Baptistic Theologies

Publication – Twice a year

IBTS CENTRE

Studies on discipleship in honour of Parush R. Parushev

Contents

Editorial

This particular edition of *Baptistic Theologies* has been produced to honour the considerable contribution of Doc Dr P R Parushev to IBTS Prague and latterly IBTSC Amsterdam. It has been published as part of our regular series but is intended to mark the occasion of Parush's 'retirement' from his full-time role with the institution: a role which he first took up in the year 2000. As a consequence, this edition of the journal begins with three personal and shorter 'appreciations' designed to communicate something of Parush's activities, character, and influence as a 'baptistic' theologian. These appreciations are intended to be illustrative rather than exhaustive of this influence.

In the rest of the journal friends and colleagues have written articles on the subject of 'discipleship: in the thick of things'. This title was deliberately chosen as a play on words. It is a phrase that reflects something of the emphasis of two of Parush's own teachers and mentors, James Wm McClendon and Glen Stassen. Parush has played an important part in disseminating, advocating, and interpreting the significance of this emphasis for European Baptist life through a wide range of publications, lectures, and conferences. The significance of McClendon and Stassen first for Parush and, indeed, for that which is described as 'baptistic' theology, will be explicitly and implicitly apparent in a number of the articles.

In the first article Marion Carson explores the Shepherd motif of the Old and New Testaments. She does this in a conversation with ideas of faith development. As a consequence, she raises important questions as to how leaders can help individuals and congregations grow in maturity. This in turn, however, necessitates that those who would lead are involved in a process of continual learning and development to form characteristics which foster co-operation and unity. Henk Bakker also picks up on biblical themes. His article, however, moves in a very different direction. In a wide- ranging discussion engaging with a variety of voices from the early church and more recent baptist ideas, including those of McClendon, he explores the way and extent to which disciples participate in the sufferings of Jesus Christ. This participation, he argues, is a form of 'thick discipleship' often ignored in Baptist thinking but evident in the lives of those who may be considered Baptist 'saints'.

The willingness for disciples to endure suffering is also discussed in Toivo Pilli's article where he focusses on the historic Anabaptist tradition. He argues that the Anabaptist understanding of the nature of discipleship has the potential to inspire, enrich, and indeed correct contemporary understandings. Such Anabaptist discipleship, he contends, was more rooted in the primary theology of the practices of the church than is the case with at

least some more contemporary expressions. As such, in his discussion, he gives attention to the significance of communal ecclesial practices including baptism and the Lord's Supper. This theme of the significance of the ecclesial community for discipleship is forefronted by Keith Jones in his essay. With reference to his years of shared activity, study, and research with Parush on the staff of IBTS, he discusses the gathering, intentional, convictional, missional, porous communities of believers that constitute a baptist ecclesiology. In turn, he argues that such individual baptist communities exist on the journey of discipleship in a 'web' of interconnectedness with other congregations in a way that might seem 'counter-intuitive to the inherited church'.

Lina Toth also picks up on the significance of the Christian community for discipleship formation. Her article, however, approaches this through the specific language of friendship. As she demonstrates, this language is not unproblematic when applied to the nature of relationships found and experienced in a church community. This notwithstanding, with an interesting reflection upon the language of 'comrade' she argues that friendship 'can be seen as one of the central practices of the believing community set in a culture which yearns for connection but often is unable to practice healthy bonds of intimacy and love'. The importance of relationship with others in the formation of disciples is also discussed by Ivana and Tim Noble. Their own contribution, however, takes us again in another different and fascinating direction as they draw upon the Orthodox tradition. This is an area of study in which they have actively participated with Parush in recent years. In what they describe as a 'gift' for Parush, they 'look at the relationship between a *starets* and her or his disciple through the insights of Mother Maria Gysi, a twentieth-century Orthodox nun from Switzerland, who lived her religious life in England'. This is relationship, they claim, in which they can see analogies both in terms of Parush's own relationship with his mentors and in the way in which he relates to the students he teaches.

Jim Purves, in his article, with reference to his own Scottish Baptist context and some recent research by an IBTS/IBTSC doctoral graduate, moves the discussion into the arena of the correlating nature of mission, ministry, and discipleship. He claims that there is a need for greater embodied and practice-based approaches to ministry and mission if the desired outcome is discipleship understood as 'the forming a life disciplined to grow into the same virtues, the same convictions and engage in the same practices as Jesus Christ Himself'. In the final article of the Journal, David McMillan offers caution and corrective on the whole theme of discipleship as he engages directly with the theology of McClendon and the ethics of Glen Stassen in relation to the experience of Northern Ireland. The caution he offers is with respect to the uncritical adoption of fixed forms of

discipleship without recognising the cultural and other influences which shape that form. The corrective, he argues, is to see discipleship as something that requires by its very nature constant critical reflection and construction, Stassen would say repentance, if it is to remain faithful and ethical. The pursuit of such faithfulness is exemplified in all the articles is something of which Parush would surely approve.

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Parush Parushev – An Appreciation

Tony Peck

In summer 2000 I took part of my Study Leave from my work at Bristol Baptist College to spend a month or so at IBTS in Prague. My intention was to pick up my research interest in religious freedom and human rights.

So it was then that I first met Dr Parush Parushev who had not long come to Prague as Academic Dean of IBTS. Those first impressions have remained with me; of a warm engaging personality, a quick and lively mind, an irrepressible enthusiasm and sense of humour, an occasional tendency to explode if overheated (though just as quickly to subside) and the ability to doggedly pursue ideas and convictions to their logical conclusions, often well past the point when the rest of us have dropped out of the debate!

That first meeting in Parush's study changed the way I thought of religious freedom as part of human rights. He introduced me to the writings of his beloved teacher and mentor, the late Glen Stassen, and also Michael Westmorland-White. The idea that human rights are not universal foundations in themselves but have a universal application, that they are more of a *lingua franca*, a trade language that enables the discourse to take place in society about what it means to be human, is one that I have found greatly helpful in the years since then. It has proved especially relevant in the contemporary questioning and even disillusionment with the human rights project as we have known it over these past 70 years.

As someone who does not regard himself as an academic I have nevertheless been grateful to Parush for his encouragement to me to write about religious freedom, human rights, and other subjects to do with Baptist identity. This has enabled me to build in a much-needed reflective component to my work as EBF and has kept me reading and researching as my travels have allowed. Many conversations with Parush over morning coffee in the lounge on the Prague campus have invariably helped to stretch my thinking and hone my own ideas.

When I became the General Secretary of the European Baptist Federation in 2004, I was living for a week each month on the Prague campus of IBTS and so got to know Parush much better. His participation in morning prayers was often a heartfelt prayer of gratitude 'for another day of life' and indeed Parush is someone who seems to me to live with an optimistic outlook and a sense of grateful dependency on God. And for me that is all the more meaningful because I know him to be someone who has had his own deep struggles with the circumstances of life.

As I got to know Parush's amazing story—from top mathematician and scientist in communist Bulgaria to committed Christian and theologian, my admiration for him grew. I have enjoyed him as a stimulating companion and debating partner, often over a meal or a glass of that 'liquid bread' that Parush so loves. He has that ability to share ideas with passion and enthusiasm, and often accompanied by laughter and an ability to puncture the pretentious and the ridiculous.

One of the main influences on his students has been his own strong commitment to the theological writings of James William McClendon. Here I have to be honest and say that, whilst I admire McClendon as a key 'baptist' theologian and have found some of his insights very helpful, nevertheless I do not altogether share Parush's unbridled enthusiasm.

But I well understood the desire to find a Baptist/baptistic way of 'doing theology' and that in doing so we are not simply borrowing the theological clothes of other Christian theological traditions and methodologies. I can see that McClendon's theological basis in ethics as the 'convictions of the convictional community' is one very helpful model for Baptists to begin to think about themselves in a different way. But perhaps it is not the only one…

So far as the EBF is concerned Parush's work at IBTS has been of great significance. The Prague years were those in which IBTS managed to gradually secure the trust and confidence of many of the Baptist leaders in Eastern Europe and the Middle East who embraced a more conservative theology and way of being church.

Parush's background, his knowledge of Slavic languages, his instinctive understanding of those who come from a Slavic Baptist context and his capacity for genuine friendship with them, were critical factors in all this. In my travels as EBF General Secretary I have met IBTS alumni coming into key positions in their own Baptist Unions who have testified to the formative influence of Parush's thought and mentoring. Inevitably they refer to the way in which Parush had helped to deliver them from a 'closed' understanding of Christian life and theology into the freedom to think for themselves and, before God, to work out their theological convictions and their own understanding of what kind of churches we need to face the missionary challenges of Europe and the Middle East today.

In this Parush and his IBTS colleagues have made an immense contribution to the ongoing life of the EBF and especially in beginning to form models of theological education more relevant to the contemporary situations of our member Unions. Parush himself has travelled to many seminaries and Bible schools and encouraged and inspired students and staff with his unique blend of rapid-fire teaching spiced with humour and insightful asides.

And I well remember an EBF Religious Freedom Monitoring visit to Azerbaijan that included Parush. Many Baptists believers were experiencing pressure and discrimination against them, and two pastors had recently been in prison for a time. As we confronted the rather wily and evasive ex-KGB Chairman of the Government Religious Affairs Committee, my instinct was to go in hard with the evidence we had of blatant discrimination and ill-treatment of Baptist leaders and churches. Afterwards I was grateful for Parush's restraining hand on my arm, and the whispered reminder that this is a 'shame and honour' culture and that we needed to be affirming of the government and this less-than-straightforward representative of it if we were to then make our case on the religious freedom issues. Not for the last time I was saved from taking the wrong approach in a culture foreign to me.

From time to time Parush has represented the EBF on wider bodies. Most notably for some years he was a member of the Expert Group on Ethics of the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) with which the EBF has an Agreement for Mutual Cooperation. In grappling with complex issues of bioethics etc., the Group expressed great appreciation for Parush's contribution which brought together his scientific and theological expertise.

These are just some of the ways in which the European Baptist Federation, and myself as its General Secretary, have deeply appreciated the contribution that Parush has made to our life over these past fifteen years. As a mainstay of the very special brand of community developed in the IBTS Prague years, we are especially grateful to Parush that he was willing to make the transition for a time to a very different model of being in community in IBTSC in Amsterdam from 2013. His presence and academic reputation were critical to IBTSC being quickly accepted by its new doctoral accrediting body, the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam.

But it is above all as a human being seeking to follow the Lord Jesus Christ that we have appreciated Parush most. As a former scientist he has not been afraid to show his emotions, often born of a passion for justice for all and compassion for those in need. That, in turn, has been deeply rooted in a vibrant faith that has shone through all he has said and done.

I end this appreciation of my friend and colleague Parush Parushev by (appropriately I think) giving him the last word. These are words written by him that come at the end of a chapter about his life in a book published some years ago by the Baptist World Alliance. They sum up his outlook on life and faith, and his contribution to IBTS and to the work of the European Baptist Federation:

> Nothing could compare with the vibrancy of the life at IBTS and the joy of serving this community. It is academically challenging, culturally diverse, and spiritually enriching. True Christian life is always in the making. We do not know what God has in store ahead.

God's ways with us are always surprising, challenging and sometimes uneasy. Yet perhaps those uneasy turns at the end turn out to be a special blessing.[1]

We will greatly miss Parush from the full-time staff of IBTSC in Amsterdam. But I am sure that God has a lot more in store for him and in the EBF we look forward to benefiting from it for many years to come.

Tony Peck
General Secretary of the European Baptist Federation

Lina Toth (Andronovienė)

Parush is one of the most generous academics I know. His generosity was one of the first things I learned about him and from him, and it has remained with me as one of my most important lessons, not just for academic life, but any life that strives to be Christ-like.

As I later found out, such generosity can be at times hard to find in universities, colleges, and seminaries. 'Publish or perish' becomes a dangerous culture in which scholars—theologians included—can become very guarded about what and when to share their work in progress, even with one's colleagues, before the thoughts are firmly fixed in some journal or book.

Not so with Parush. First of all, he loves to think on his feet. He finds out what he thinks as he processes those thoughts out loud, which is why being in his presence, whether in a lecture, a postgraduate seminar, or a 'table talk' *a la* Luther is never a dull experience. Yet this is not a selfish exercise of discovering his own mind. Although he loves to talk, Parush readily and graciously acknowledges those who stimulate his thinking through a question, observation, or objection. If his thoughts end up in writing, such contributions are regularly acknowledged in the footnotes. (Parush's footnotes are a separate story—they can take more space on the page than the main text!)

Such interest in and acknowledgement of others' questions and ideas were an important lesson for me personally, as a young theologian—something that I have always admired and vowed to follow. The same would be true, I am sure, for many others who have encountered Parush at IBTS and, over this last couple of years, at IBTSC. To the students, daunted as they can be at times by Parush's intellectual rigour (and the length at which he can talk!), to be listened to seriously and to participate in a discussion is

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[1] Chapter 10 from *Stars Lighting up the Sky: Stories of Contemporary Christian Heroes*, Tony Cupit, (USA: Baptist World Alliance, 2003), p. 130.

a great encouragement and a push along the path of a budding theologian learning to think for herself or himself. In many ways, it is thanks to Parush that IBTS has developed such a rich culture of conversation, passionate debate, and constructive critique—all of these which have made IBTS a wonderful place to work out one's own theology. The very journal you are now holding in your hands, alongside the *Journal of European Baptist Studies,* are the result of such a culture, and Parush's contribution has been immense.

I do hope that such a culture has produced seeds that many students and colleagues will sow back into their own places of learning, and that such places will display and nurture the same generous, gracious way of sharing theology and exploring theology in the making that Parush has demonstrated.

Another aspect of this generosity is the time and energy that Parush invested in visiting and helping many evangelical seminaries, Bible schools, and Baptist Unions across Europe: Armenia, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Russia, Ukraine… I am sure I have missed a few! How on earth he found time and energy for this, I am not quite sure, but I will remain forever grateful for the support and encouragement he gave to the small Baptist Union of Lithuania and the vision of finally establishing an appropriately modest, mobile, sustainable Bible school there that would serve the needs of its small, but very diverse churches. And so every time I visit my Lithuanian Baptist community, I inevitably am asked by someone about Parush and when he will come again for another seminar to 'talk about theology'!

Yet what kind of theology? Parush has a particular view of the value of systematic theology and would at times shock people by making observations such as, 'systematic theology is simply an organised subjectivity'. For Parush, theology is inseparable from discussing convictions. Anyone who has been at any class or seminar with Parush will remember that word at least! However, with the popularity of the word comes the danger of its misuse, and a statement that 'theology is about convictions' can mean little or much depending on how convictions are understood. Parush's approach has been one of deep appreciation for, and engagement with, the work of his own teacher, James Wm McClendon, and disseminating and popularising McClendon's thought has been and continues to be one of Parush's passions.

And so it was that to study under Parush, at least for the students in the Applied Theology programme, meant a close encounter with the formidable three volumes of McClendon's trilogy.[2] They did not have to

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[2] James Wm McClendon, Jr., *Systematic Theology: Ethics* (Abingdon Press,1996, 2002)*, Doctrine* (Abingdon Press, 1994)*, Witness* (Abingdon Press, 2000); see also the new edition of this trilogy published by Baylor University Press (2012).

accept this particular perspective—and certainly not everybody did—but they were encouraged to engage with it, and to at least begin formulating their own response to these ideas and concepts: 'narrative theology'; 'convictional sets'; 'community of reference'; 'primary and secondary theology'; 'the baptist vision', etc.

I had the privilege to be in the very first cohort of the newly launched MTh in Applied Theology programme in 2001, of which Parush was the first Director/Course Leader. The words we heard in our seminars that first autumn sounded so fresh and different from the introductions to theology that I had encountered before. I took to recording and transcribing some of the lectures, with Parush's permission, with the intention of them becoming the basis for some articles to be written (writing not being the most favourite activity in the world for Parush!).

Writing this piece took me back to some of those files. The very first one comes from a seminar on McClendon's trilogy right after the September Intensives, when the chaotic exhilaration of those first very intensive weeks (lectures from morning to late evening for three weeks, honest!) was over and life was starting in earnest in our diverse residential community of the seminary:

> We have to figure out what is at the core of somebody's—and our own—worldview. […] This is what we defined as convictions and convictional sets; the worldview is a coherent and stable set of beliefs related to each other, most of the time implicitly, and sometimes explicitly. This is what forms our perspectives and our standpoint in relation to the meaning of life which we define in terms of ultimate reality. […]
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> Because of their convictions different communities that comprise a particular culture have different appropriations of it and different contribution to this culture. If this is the case, how do we communicate our convictions back to the culture? We have to express them in terms of [that particular] culture. That is why it is so important to learn the language of this 'post-name-it-as-you-like-it' thing—post-modernism, post-Christian, post-industrial, post-whatever world. [This] is the task of contextualisation. [And] we have again to think whether this contextualisation is merely a helpful device or whether by its means we will elusively bring culture back into the church and make it a part of the church's life. […]
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> Any contextualisation is an attempt to explain our convictional sets in the language that can be understood by the people who do not belong to our community. At the same time, it is a door open wide for the culture to enter the church. Therefore it

is my firm belief that there is no such thing as a church separate from a culture; these always are in constant exchange and mutually interdependent.[3]

I do not know if Parush would still agree with every one of these words—I think he mostly would![4] But such ideas were extremely helpful to me and many others who were facing the challenge of constructing some kind of a workable theology of culture, trying to make sense of the monumental changes taking place in the cultures of Eastern Europe.

Many of us from Eastern Europe were also wrestling with seeming tensions, if not full-blown conflicts, between the traditional ways of Baptist life and the strange dissonance brought by the teachers and preachers from abroad who, since the 1990s, started visiting our communities and offering a different version of theological ideas and church practices. Some of those ideas and practices were exciting, some entertaining, but some were clearly at odds with the preaching and the practice of the Christian life as we knew it, shaped under the church's oppression by the Soviet or Communist regimes. Inevitably, such discrepancies brought serious disagreements, and sometimes splits, between those believers who welcomed the new ideas and practices, and those who felt very uneasy about them. Having witnessed the same changes and tensions in both the culture and church in his native Bulgaria, Parush had no trouble understanding the extent of this challenge, and could offer helpful commentary for both sides.[5]

But the starting point for his response to the clashes between East and West, between 'old' and 'new', between modern and post-modern, was a demonstrable, deep love for the church—however imperfect that church might be. For many young, confident, impatient theological minds and temperaments, this was an invaluable lesson to observe and emulate. We were encouraged to pay close and humble attention to the 'primary theology' of our churches. First of all, this involved discerning what that theology was, amidst all the proclaimed words and practices and actions which at times contradicted those very words. Second, we were to understand and analyse the reasons for the formation of such theology. Only then were we in a position to consider reasons and avenues for change. (Those of you who have been introduced to McClendon by Parush will recognise his definition of theology here!)

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[3] Parush Parushev, lecture on James Wm. McClendon's *Ethics,* Chapter 1 for the seminar on 'Church in Contemporary Society' module, 20 September 2001. Recorded by Lina Andronoviene during an oral presentation.

[4] At least, he did some years after the lecture—see Parush Parushev and Lina Andronoviene, 'McClendon's Concept of Mission as Witness', Chapter 11, in Wilbert R Shenk and Peter F Penner, eds., *Anabaptism and Mission* (Erlangen, Germany: Neufeld Verlag Schwartzenfeld, 2007), pp. 247-264.

[5] See, for instance, Parush R Parushev, 'East and West: A Theological Conversation', *Journal of European Baptist Studies,* Vol. 1 No. 1, (September 2000), pp. 31-44.

Another extremely helpful concept for making sense of the theology and changes in our home churches was the particular way of being a church that could be termed as 'baptist' (or 'baptistic', or free church, or the believer's church—in other words, a tradition that follows in the footsteps of the Radical Reformation and has the task of the continuous transformation of the intentional community of disciples at its very core).[6] Not all took this on board, preferring to see Baptists as representatives of the Protestant camp, but many of us—especially those coming from the East of Europe—found it an incredibly helpful way to understand and interpret our own communities and hopefully help them live out their 'baptist' vision. Some colleagues were not fully convinced, which ensured regular discussions and lively debates, much to the students' amusement!

One important result of Parush's approach is that rather than becoming narrow, and inward-looking, such an interpretation of 'baptist' identity recognises the need for other perspectives and therefore stimulates dialogue with other types of churches. Therefore a number of students supervised by Parush have engaged in fruitful dialogue between different ecclesial traditions; of course, this is evidence of Parush's own interest in exploring the Orthodox tradition in particular.[7]

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Eddy van der Borght

Dr Parush Parushev was introduced to me just before the summer of 2013. It was the time when the negotiations with IBTS were being finalised and I had just become academic dean of research at the Faculty of Theology at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. We had to work together intensively, since more than twenty PhD proposals from IBTS students had also to be accepted by our Doctorate Board. These kinds of transitions inevitably require some paper work that for many might soon become boring, tedious, and demotivating. Not so for Parush. He found it quite natural to follow all

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[6] Parush R Parushev, 'Baptistic Convictional Hermeneutics', in Helen Dare and Simon Woodman, eds., *The Plainly Revealed Word of God? Baptist Hermeneutics in Theory and Practice* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2011), pp.172-190. On the notion of 'small "b" baptist' tradition, distinct from 'protestant' and 'catholic' church patterns, see McClendon's *Systematic Theology: Ethics, Volume I*, Revised Edition (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 2002), pp. 17-34.

[7] Parush R. Parushev, 'Walking in the Dawn of the Light: On the Salvation Ethics of Ecclesial Communities in the Orthodox Tradition from a Radical Reformation Perspective' (PhD Thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, School of Theology), (ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing, 2007, UMI No. 3260231 [ISBN: 978-1-109-97994-7]); Ivana Noble, Kateřina Bauerová, Tim Noble and Parush Parushev, *Cesty pravoslavné teologie ve 20. století na Západ* [The Road of Orthodox Theology in the 20th century in the West] (Prague, CZ: Centrum pro stadium democracie a kultury (CDK), 2012).

the rules very strictly and to apply them self-evidently. The acceptance of bureaucracy with a courteous and benevolent approach made it easy for him to work with the Vrije Universiteit administration. This attitude was one of the reasons we were able to transfer most of the PhD proposals without major obstacles.

I soon observed his passion for the research work of the IBTS students, as if they were his children. Tirelessly he explained the projects of the students, framing them in their context, convincing us of not only the personal, but also the scientific and societal relevance of their research. Having lived in many countries and having experienced a variety of cultures, as rector he was excellently placed to guide his students to work in a new research culture in Amsterdam. He was the bridge for the IBTS students to relate to extra supervisors at the Vrije Universiteit.

Dr Parushev is an impressive scholar with two PhDs and a keen interest in academic research. We appreciated him as a committed Christian academic theologian with an ecumenical spirit and open mind, captured by McClendon's convictional theology, who easily related to scholars in the field of other religions and world views at our faculty. At the same time, he never lost his interest in his first academic 'love', that is, in the field of robotics as a member of the Bulgarian Academy of Science. This broad research scope was visible in his interest in ongoing research in other disciplines at our university and his love for interdisciplinary research.

Last but not least, I came to know him as a warm personality that left a lasting impression. I miss him around the Faculty and wish him fruitful academic years ahead in his native Bulgaria.

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Feed My Lambs: Some Pastoral Implications of a Biblical Metaphor

Marion Carson

Introduction

In John 21:15-17, Jesus instructs Peter to 'tend my sheep' and 'feed my lambs', thus commissioning him, so Christians believe, as the first pastor of the church. The shepherd metaphor employed here has proved a powerful and enduring one. Even in an urban age, we still speak of our ministers as 'shepherds' and church leaders as responsible for 'pastoral care'.[1] Here, my aim is to examine some of the implications of Jesus' instruction for contemporary pastoral leadership. First, I shall explore the biblical metaphor of the shepherd, and propose that it suggests three inter-related pastoral tasks, all of which are important in enabling the church to carry out its mission: protecting, guiding, caring, maintaining unity, and feeding the flock, understood both literally and metaphorically. Second, I shall suggest that in the minds of the New Testament writers, maturity and unity are very closely related, and that 'feeding', in the sense of teaching, is intended for growth, not simply for sustenance. Third, drawing on faith development theory, I shall briefly offer some suggestions as to how pastors might be enabled to 'feed' their flock appropriately in our church setting today.

The Shepherd Motif in the Old and New Testaments

In John 21:15, after Jesus helps the disciples to catch a large amount of fish and eats breakfast with them, the focus narrows to a conversation between Jesus and Peter. Jesus asks Peter if he loves him above all else.[2] Peter answers that he does. Jesus asks a second and third time: does Peter love him? Peter, upset because Jesus repeats the question, insists that he does. He is given three instructions: 'Feed (*boske*) my lambs', 'Tend (*poimaine*) my sheep', and 'Feed (*boske*) my sheep'. With these words, Jesus asks Peter to take on pastoral responsibility for the disciples and other

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[1] On the shepherd metaphor and pastoral care see Seward Hiltner, 'The Christian Shepherd', *Pastoral Theology,* 10 (1959), pp. 47-54; Derek Tidball, *Skillful Shepherds: Explorations in Pastoral Theology* (Leicester: Apollos 1997); Quentin P. Kinnison, 'Shepherd or One of the Sheep: Revisiting the Biblical Metaphor of the Pastorate', *Journal of Religious Leadership,* 9 (2010), pp. 59-91.

[2] John Varghese, *The Imagery of Love in the Gospel of John* (Rome: Gregorian and Biblical Press, 2009), pp. 357-8; Ilaria Ramelli, 'Simon, Son of John, Do You Love Me? Some Reflections on John 21:15', *NovT,* 50 (2008), pp. 332-50.

converts—that is, the church. [3] The 'good shepherd' (John 10:11) is delegating this role to him. But what is Jesus asking Peter to do?

In the Old Testament, the people of Israel are frequently referred to as sheep (Pss 100:3; 74:1; Zech 9:16; Jer 13:17; Isa 53:6), and God as their shepherd (Gen 49:24; Ezek 34:31; Pss 23;79:13). [4] The One who led his sheep out of Egypt (Ps 78:52) continues to guide and protect them gently and compassionately (Isa 40:11). God is the exemplar, but human leaders are also said to be shepherds (Num 27:17; 2 Sam 7:7). David, the shepherd boy, becomes the shepherd king of Israel (e.g. 2 Sam 5:2). [5] Even a foreign king, Cyrus, can be said to be the shepherd of the people (Isa 44:28). But human leaders fail. They fail when they neglect the flock and look after only their own needs. They become greedy, feeding only themselves (Ezek 34). While they become fat, their flocks become malnourished and ill. They allow the sheep to scatter and expose them to danger, so that they become 'food for the wild animals' (Ezek 34:8) They do not look after the weak or search for strays, and rule over their flock harshly.

The prophets have much to say about such poor shepherds who fail their flocks (see also Zech 10-11; Jer 23:1-8; 25:34-38). They will be punished, and God, the great shepherd, will intervene, bringing the scattered sheep back and feeding them on good pasture (Ezek 34:12,14; cf. also Jer 31:10; Amos 3:12). Sometimes God is said to provide directly, on other occasions he brings in others to shepherd the scattered flock (Jer 23:4). Zechariah, Micah, and Ezekiel look forward to the eschatological Davidic Shepherd who will care for the restored flock (Ezek 34-37; Zech 11-13; Micah 5:1-4). Isaiah looks forward to the time when the Great Shepherd will bring peace (Isa 5:17), and there will be safe grazing. In Deutero-Isaiah, the task of bringing the sheep together extends beyond Israel (Isa 56:3-8) and is given to the Servant, the universal saviour who will unite God's people (Isa 49:9-10; 53:6). [6]

For the gospel writers, Jesus fulfils this Messianic role, both in the present and eschatologically. In Mark 6:30-44 he is said to have compassion on the people 'because they were like sheep without a shepherd' (cf. Num 27:17; 1 Kings 22:17), and he proceeds to teach them (Mark 6:34) and feed them (Mark 6:41,42). In Matthew 26:30-35 Jesus is the shepherd who cares for and heals his people in the Davidic tradition (Mt 2:6), and the new Moses

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[3] Christians have understood the relationship between Peter and the church in different ways. See, for example, Martin Hengel, *The Underestimated Apostle (*Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2010). Pheme Perkins, *Peter: Apostle for the Whole Church (*Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1994).
[4] On the shepherd metaphor in Ezekiel, see Joel K.T. Biwul, *A Theological Examination of Symbolism in Ezekiel with Emphasis on the Shepherd Metaphor* (Carlisle: Langham Monographs, 2013).
[5] Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel.* Interpretation A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), p. 237.
[6] On the shepherd metaphor in the Old Testament, see Jonathan Gan, *The Metaphor of Shepherd in the Hebrew Bible: A Historical-Literary Reading* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of Maryland, 2007).

who leads his people to safety. He is the messianic shepherd of Zechariah 13:7 (Mt 26:30-35; Mark 14:26-31) and the shepherd-king who will judge the people at the end times (Mt 25:31-46; cf. Mt 18:10-14; Lk 15:3-7).[7] In the Johannine tradition, the shepherd metaphor is developed. Religious leaders are failing the flock (John 10:11-18), which is scattered, and in danger. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep (John 10:11,15); he is the universal Messiah, who will not only bring scattered Israel together, but also Jews and Gentiles (cf. John 11:51-52).[8] The good shepherd is the sacrificial lamb who will ultimately lead his people to 'springs of the water of life' (Rev 7:16-17).

This brief survey of the shepherd metaphor in Scripture, suggests that the shepherd role entails caring for, protecting, and guiding the flock. It also, however, reveals a repeated emphasis on the need for unity, and a responsibility of the shepherd to seek and maintain it. Shepherds are to keep the flock together, stop them from scattering, and bring back the lost. For the evangelists the tasks of maintaining unity and universal mission are closely related, and this is particularly true of John. In chapter 17, Jesus' prayer for unity amongst his disciples is to be seen in the context of his sending the disciples out into the world (John 17:18; 20:21). Indeed, unity is seen as a prerequisite for the task of universal mission.[9] Thus, when Jesus instructs Peter to tend and feed his flock, he is not only asking him to care for, guide and protect the flock, ensuring that their needs are met; he is also setting him the task of maintaining unity in the church in order that the task of reaching out to both Jews and Gentiles may be carried out.

Feeding, growth, and unity

It is easy to see how the ideas implicit in 'tending' can be related to the idea of unity. The shepherd protects the flock and gathers strays in. But what about feeding?[10] Of course, the physical need for food must be met. The Old Testament writers commonly see feeding in safety as a part of the role of the shepherd. In John 21, the disciples' needs are more than

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[7] Wayne Baxter, *Israel's Only Shepherd: Matthew's Shepherd Motif and His Social Setting* (London: T&T Clark, 2012); Young S. Chae, *Jesus as the Eschatological Davidic Shepherd: Studies in the Old Testament, Second Temple Judaism and in the Gospel of Matthew* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006); Dale C. Allison, *The New Moses: A Matthaean Typology* (Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress 1993).

[8] Andreas J. Köstenberger, 'Jesus the Good Shepherd Who will also Bring Other Sheep (John 10:16): The Old Testament Background of a Familiar Metaphor', *Bulletin for Biblical Research,* 12 (2002), pp. 67-96. See further Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible* (Leicester; Apollos, 2006).

[9] Andreas J. Köstenberger, 'The Challenge of a Systematized Biblical Theology of Mission: Missiological Insights from the Gospel of John', *Missiology*, 23 (1995), pp. 445-64.

[10] On the distinction between the two verbs see Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John XII-XXI,* (London: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 1104-5. On its pastoral implications see further, Caleb O. Oladipo 'John 21:15-17' *Interpretation*, 51 (1997), pp. 65-66.

adequately provided for by the miraculous catch of fish.[11] The passage, however, also harks back to the miraculous feeding in chapter six, and to Jesus' description of himself as the bread of life: 'For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him' (John 6:55-56).

Besides looking after physical needs, Jesus also provides spiritual food. In addition to the Eucharist, of course, the bonds of unity are maintained in the agape meal, and in table fellowship. But throughout the New Testament, feeding is also a metaphor for teaching, particularly in relation to spiritual growth. Paul and the writer to the Hebrews insist that in order to grow, their communities need to eat solid food. While they do not link the idea of feeding with that of the shepherd, they do see a close association between growth and unity.[12] For example, power struggles in the Corinthian church are damaging the community. If they ever did understand what they were taught about the weakness of the cross, they have failed to see its implications.[13] They concern themselves with 'childish' things (1 Cor 13:11) when they should be practising sacrificial love. The writer to the Hebrews thinks his flock is resisting growth, and in danger of regressing (Heb 5:12-6:3). They are preoccupied with facts about faith and practice, rather than thinking about what it means to follow Jesus, the 'Great Shepherd' (Heb 13:20), in a hostile world. In a community faced with persecution this is understandable—in times of crisis it is tempting to stay with the familiar rather than learn new things.[14] However, this is to drink only 'milk', and avoid the responsibility of becoming mature (Heb 6:1).[15] In 1 Peter 2:2 the author tells his readers to 'long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation'. While there is no mention here of moving on to 'solid food', he is clearly concerned for their spiritual and moral growth.[16] He wants them to be notable for a lack of envy, malice, guile, insincerity, envy, and slander (1 Peter 2:1)—for these are precisely the attitudes that will weaken them and drive them apart.

Communities need to know the basics of the faith, why they exist, and what they believe. But for these writers, this is not enough. Childish behaviour and attitudes will not help them to withstand internal struggles and

[11] See, for example, Sandra M. Schneiders, 'John 21:1-4', *Interpretation*, 43 (1989), pp. 70-75.
[12] On Paul's use of the feeding metaphor, see Jennifer Houston MacNeel, 'Feeding with Milk: Paul's Nursing Metaphors in Context', *Review and Expositor,* 110 (2013), pp. 561-75.
[13] David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker, 2003), p .109.
[14] William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8* Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, Tx.: Word Books 1991), p. 135.
[15] Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2012), p. 259.
[16] The metaphor was familiar in both the Jewish and Graeco-Roman worlds, especially in relation to moral growth and development. Philip L.Tite, 'Nurslings, Milk and Moral Development in the Greco-Roman Context: A Reappraisal of the Paraenetic Utilization of Metaphor in 1 Peter 2.1-32', *JSNT,* 31 (2009), pp. 371-400.

persecution. For this they need to be mature, and in order to become mature they need appropriate teaching. As the writer to the Ephesians says, the pastoral responsibility is to enable believers to grow into the 'full stature of Christ' (Eph 4:9-16), so that they may live in unity as mature followers of Christ. [17] In other words, their lives should be characterized by self-sacrificing love, leaving their personal needs and wishes aside. For some, like Peter himself, this will mean losing their lives.[18] For most, however, it entails learning new attitudes towards others, and not insisting on one's own way.

The New Testament writers are convinced that unity is essential if the church is to carry out its mission. For there to be unity, believers need to be mature, and for believers to become mature, an appropriate diet of teaching is required. Since any community of believers is made up of people at various stages of life and with differing experience, part of the pastoral role entails knowing not only what to teach, but when and how the diet should change from milk to solid food.

Feeding in contemporary pastoral practice: Fowler's faith development theory

The instruction to tend and feed is given to Peter, but the shepherd role is not limited to him. The disciples must go to the lost sheep of Israel, and care for their needs (Mt 9:35-10:16). All members of the community should care for each other (Mt 25:31-46). Pastors are to tend the sheep, keeping them together when 'savage wolves' try to lead believers astray (Acts 20:28-29). They must look out for the wellbeing of the flock, rather than their own personal gain, and lead by example rather than in a domineering, authoritarian fashion (1 Peter 5:1-4). [19]

Today's pastors have the same responsibilities. In large part, these should be shared and distributed amongst members of the community, making use of differing gifts and expertise (1 Cor 12:4-11; Eph 4:11-14). For those with a teaching responsibility, however, what we have said here raises a question. How do we determine when to teach the basics and when to go deeper? Fortunately, there are resources to help us with this task. In particular, faith development theory can help us understand something of the

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[17] Frank Thielman, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker 2010), p. 283. See further, Peter W. Gosnell, 'Networks and Exchanges: Ephesians 4:7-16 and the Community Function of Teachers', *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, 30 (2000), pp. 135-43.

[18] Helen C. Orchard, *Courting Betrayal: Jesus as Victim in the Gospel of John* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), p. 260.

[19] John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York, N.Y.: Doubleday, 2000), p. 842; Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter* (Minneapolis, Minn: Augsburg Fortress, 1996), p. 322.

needs of our communities, and to tailor teaching appropriately. At its core is the idea that our faith is not static, but our understanding and expression of our faith changes as we mature and respond to life experience. Here, we will focus on the most widely influential theory—that of James Fowler. Drawing on psychosocial development theory, Fowler sets out to 'clarify the developmental dynamics of faith as we go about making and maintaining meaning in life.'[20] He suggests seven stages through which an individual might progress.

Development starts at the beginning of life (Stage 0: primal faith). The sense of relationship with another who is trustworthy to provide basic needs is essential for the development of trust. In infancy, Fowler's Stage 1, story and myth help children make imaginative attempts to understand the world around them and to absorb the values of the community. At this stage (intuitive-projective faith), these stories are understood literally, rather than symbolically. A sense of fairness and rightness in their limited world is important. As children begin to experience the world outside the immediate family, they need to learn to cope with life beyond the home. At Stage 2 (mythic-literal faith), these experiences are seen against the 'norm' of all that is familiar, and the stories of the faith tradition are seen in concrete rather than symbolic ways. The child still sees its own needs as paramount (the 'imperial self'), and its impulses need to be held in check by loving adults. In adolescence (Stage 3: synthetic-conventional faith), however, peer groups become all important, and leaders must inspire respect if their authority is to be maintained. The faith of the adolescent is essentially the faith of the group, yet it is a deeply personal 'lifeline'.[21]

Moving away from home, say, for university or work, can cause questions to arise. Many begin to explore the beliefs of their community, through reading or discussion with others. If they are convinced by the arguments for them, they are likely to stay; others may move to other communities. Individuals who have thought through and 'own' their beliefs are said to have reached Stage 4 (individuative-reflective faith). Those who move into Stage 5 (conjunctive faith) are most often responding to a crisis, usually in mid-life. Loss, suffering. and disappointment raise questions to which familiar teaching cannot provide answers. Fowler calls this the 'sacrament of defeat'. Those who do not abandon their faith altogether often begin to explore other traditions: 'The confines of tribe, class, religious community or nation' are let go.[22]The complexities and paradoxes of life, the commonalities of different traditions and the limitations of their own faith perspectives are acknowledged and even appreciated. For a very few,

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[20] James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York, N.Y.: HarperOne, 1995), p. xii.
[21] James W. Fowler, *Faith Development and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia, Penn.: Fortress, 1987), p. 66.
[22] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, p. 198.

according to Fowler, there is a final stage, Stage 6 (universalising faith). Some extraordinary people, such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mother Theresa spend themselves for the sake of love and justice. They think universally rather than locally, inclusively rather than exclusively.

Fowler's work gives us a way of describing and analysing what the New Testament writers knew intuitively. The basic insight is this—less mature faith is marked by strong identification with the group, a desire to be 'right' in practice and doctrine, and a tendency to distance oneself from those with whom one disagrees. More mature faith is marked by an outward-looking attitude which is less concerned with maintaining its own identity than with a desire to express love towards others, both within and beyond the immediate community. From this perspective, the factions at Corinth suggest a church populated by people who were concerned only with their own wishes, rather than the needs of others. In Hebrews, the congregation seems to want to stay at a childish level, thinking that faith is a matter of sticking to what they know, refusing to delve more deeply into the implications of their beliefs. In his letter, Peter is concerned with immature character traits which reveal a self-serving mentality with little concern for others. In Fowler's terms, all these churches might be seen as occupying stages two to three. The life of faith, however, should not be static. Believers should 'put an end to childish ways' (1 Cor 13:11) and mature into adulthood. Ultimately, preoccupation with practices and personal status or power must yield to a desire for a deeper appreciation of the significance of Jesus' work, in order to 'follow Christ on that path to final perfection, whatever the cost'.[23]

Using Fowler as a diagnostic tool and guide

The problems of inward-looking quarrels, selfish behaviour, and preoccupation with the superficial beset our churches today, just as much as in the first century. Christians continue to split over belief and practice, and indulge in damaging power struggles. However, churches that are inward-looking and preoccupied with their own community identity cannot be missional. In order to help their congregations move beyond this, therefore, pastors have to teach with growth in view. Fowler's insights can provide a basis on which to explore the practicalities of how shepherds can 'feed' their flocks appropriately, encouraging them to grow into the 'full stature of Christ'.

However, before we continue, several comments must be made. First, we need to be clear about terminology. In Fowler's usage, the term 'faith'

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[23] Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* Hermenia (Mineapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1989), p. 163.

does not refer to 'belief', as we might expect, but to 'an orientation of the total person, giving purpose and goal to one's hopes and strivings, thoughts and actions'. [24] That is, it refers to what enables us to make sense of the world and our place in it. Now, while this usage has currency for anthropological research, its use in the pastoral setting is limited. As Craig Dykstra insists, in the pastoral context faith must be seen as a dynamic relationship (not just an orientation), the 'appropriate and intentional participation in the redemptive activity of God'.[25] It is this which brings about maturing faith—not our own personal efforts or belief in a proposition.

Second, although only one of several theories of faith development,[26] Fowler's remains the most influential, and it is a measure of its importance that it has been subject to intense scrutiny. Critics frequently warn against using his stages as paradigm rather than guide. The life of faith is complex, and not everyone will or should experience fixed, sequential phases of the sort Fowler proposes. [27] Rather, we should see faith development as a continuum along which people move, both backwards and forwards, at various times in their lives, rather than a process of linear progression. As Dykstra notes, the dynamic nature of lived faith calls into question the idea that there can be an 'endpoint or highest stage' because participation in the redemptive activity of God is an inexhaustible activity; there is no end to growth in faith.[28]For this reason, the idea of a 'universalising faith' (Stage 6) as the (rarely achieved) pinnacle of development is rather suspect, and we will not include it in our considerations here. Moreover, personality types, individual experience, and cultural differences make expression of faith a more complex matter than any schema can capture.[29] We all know people whose strong opinions on certain matters might lead us to infer that they are at Stage 3, yet whose character and spirituality attest to a vibrant relationship with God. Similarly, the use of the word 'stages' runs the risk of seeing faith development as hierarchical, a danger of which Fowler himself is acutely aware. The person at Stage 5 is not superior to the person at Stage 2. The mature adult is not more valuable to God than the child or adolescent. For

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[24] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, p.14.

[25] Craig Dykstra, "What is Faith?: An Experiment in the Hypothetical Mode" in *Faith Development and Fowler* ed. by Craig Dykstra and Sharon Parks (Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education Press 1986), pp. 45-64 (p. 55). See further, Robert Davis Hughes III, *Beloved Dust: Tides of the Spirit in the Christian Life* (New York, N.Y.: Continuum, 2008), pp. 164-95.

[26] See e.g. John H. Westerhoff, *Will our Children have Faith?* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Morehouse, 2000).

[27] For example, Stephen Parker, 'Research in Fowler's Faith Development Theory: A Review Article', *Review of Religious Research,* 51 (2010), 233-252; Heinz Streib, 'Extending our Vision of Developmental Growth and Engaging in Empirical Scrutiny: Proposals for the Future of Faith Development Theory', *Religious Education,* 99 (2004), pp. 427-34; David Heywood, 'Faith Development Theory: A Case for Paradigm Change', *Journal of Beliefs and Values,* 29 (2008), pp. 263-72.

[28] Dykstra, "What is Faith?" p. 60.

[29] See for example, Randall Y. Furushima, 'Faith Development in a Cross Cultural Perspective', *Religious Education*, 80 (1985), pp. 414-20.

this reason, some prefer to use the term 'style' rather than 'stage'. Besides removing the hierarchical implications, this reminds us that differing ways of expressing faith can be attributable to temperament, taste, experience, and cultural background.[30]

Another criticism is that Fowler's focus on cognition—i.e. the way we think about our beliefs and experiences—is too narrow, male-oriented, and individualistic. For example, feminist writers have noted the importance of relationality and mutuality in women's faith development.[31] If we adopt Fowler's theory without acknowledging this difference, focussing only on cognitive and intellectual expressions of faith, there is a danger of seeing women's faith expression as immature, and of trying to impose ways of learning on women that are inappropriate and, ultimately, ineffective.

Thus, Fowler's theory must be used judiciously and with discernment. [32] It must not be used to categorize others and so exercise power over them. Rather, his insights may be thought of as one way to help us discern the 'feeding' needs of the people in our communities. An understanding that there are certain common attitudes and behaviours discernible in faith communities can help us to understand something of what is driving individuals and congregations, and to see when these attitudes might be hindering the process of 'growing into the full stature of Christ'.

Feeding for growth

Encouraging growth in individuals

How, then, can we teach with a view to growth and maturity? Maturity is not attained overnight; spiritual development is the work of a lifetime and is hardly a straightforward, linear process. It is part of the pastoral role to help people through the crises and challenges which inevitably arise. Of course, the idea that there are different stages of development has always been implicit in the tailoring of Sunday school materials, and in the provision of youth groups for adolescents. Bible stories, creeds, and catechisms teach children the worldview and values of the community in which they are growing up. Rules or principles encapsulate these values in memorable form. This kind of teaching is appropriate for those at Stage 2, whether they are children or new believers with no prior knowledge of Christianity. At Stage

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[30] See Heinz Streib, 'Faith Development Style Revisited: The Religious Styles Perspective', *The International Journal for the Theology of Religion*, 11 (2001), pp. 143-158.

[31] See, for example, Nicola Slee, *Women's Faith Development: Patterns and Processes* (Farnham: Ashgate 2004); *In Her own Time: Women and Developmental Issues in Pastoral Care,* ed. by Leanne Stevenson-Moessner (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2000).

[32] In later works Fowler discussed criticisms such as this. See for example, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian: Adult Development and Christian Faith* (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey Bass, 2000), pp. 14-35.

3, part of the teaching task is to consolidate the values and doctrines, to show why they are important for the community, and to encourage discussion within safe limits. Many will remain at this stage, expressing their faith in terms of community identity and conformity. However, the risk of becoming inward-looking, self-referential and clannish is rather high. Therefore, pastors and teachers need gently (and sometimes subtly) to point people beyond the preoccupations and practices of the community, while being sensitive to the possible reasons for an individual's apparent inability to change, such as personality, culture, intellectual ability and life experience.

For those beginning to move into Stage 4, the aim of teaching is to encourage deeper exploration of what they believe and why they believe it.

> Developmentally, it becomes a time to face the question, 'Who am I when I am not defined by this key relation/role which has been taken from me?' It can be a time of deepening one's reliance and relation for selfhood and faith upon God and community. It can also be a time for claiming a different kind of basis for one's faith and sense of self. In either case one needs consistent affirmation and support in reconstructing the bases of one's selfhood and outlook.[33]

To help those who want to 'own' and understand their faith, it is useful to introduce resources that address major questions (for example, on the doctrine of atonement or baptism) and a safe environment in which discussion can take place. However, this can be an unsettling time, both for individuals and their families, who may become alarmed when adolescents ask probing questions, or are attracted to other communities and their practices. The desire to go on to theological education, for example, is not always understood and is often discouraged. They need reassurance that this is a natural progression, rather than 'backsliding' or rebellion.

The main risk for those at Stage 4 is that they become individualistic and over-confident, convinced of their 'rightness'.[34] As Osmer says, there can be a tendency to adopt 'reductionistic monolithic stances on complex issues'.[35] With regard to Scripture, it is helpful to steer people away from proof-texting, and beyond familiar passages that bolster their theological viewpoint. An emphasis on the meta-narrative of the Scriptural canon can

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[33] James W. Fowler, 'Religious Congregations: Varieties of Presence in Stages of Faith' in *Christian Perspectives on Faith Development: A Reader,* ed. by Jeff Astley & Leslie Francis (Leominster, Mass.: Gracewing 1992), pp. 377-78.

[34] Fowler, *Faith Development and Pastoral Care*, p. 70.

[35] Richard Robert Osmer, *A Teachable Spirit: Recovering the Teaching Office of the Church* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), p. 250.

help counter reductionist tendencies.[36] So, too, can discussion of parts of the Bible that cannot easily be reduced to principles or propositions, for example, narratives (including parables), and some wisdom or apocalyptic literature. Introducing writers from different traditions might encourage reading the Bible from different perspectives.[37]

People moving into Stage 5 are less preoccupied with matters of right doctrine or practice and more concerned with how any kind of faith can be maintained in the face of loss, disappointment, or extreme suffering.[38] The danger here is that individuals suffer a 'sense of alienation and aloneness' and become detached from any faith community whatsoever.[39] Nevertheless, while crisis is deeply painful, it can lead to new beginnings.[40] People at this stage are ripe for what Ricoeur calls the 'second naiveté', in which the familiar becomes new once again, infused with new meaning and richness.[41] Sensitive pastoral guidance can encourage these explorations, helping people to appreciate Scripture's variety and richness, and to use it in new ways, for example using Psalms and Lamentations as means of prayer.[42] Different traditions can be explored for new insights, and new perspectives on familiar topics gained by means of art, film, or music, or hermeneutical approaches such as liberation theology or feminism.

Encouraging growth in congregations and leaders

Much of what we have said about individuals applies to congregations too. For example, a community that is preoccupied with maintaining its own identity, practices, and rules (suggestive of Stages 2-3) is more likely to be separatist and self-referential rather than outward looking and inclusive. A congregation with Stage 4 or Stage 5 characteristics may well want to reach out to others, but think that these others should become like them. However, this attitude is hardly conducive to unity throughout the wider church. As Jean Vanier says,

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[36] See, for example Brueggemann's *The Creative Word: Canon as Model for Biblical Education* (Philadelphia, Penn.: Fortress, 1982).

[37] Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: The Art of Spiritual Reading* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2006).

[38] For the pastoral needs of each stage, see *Psychology for Christian Ministry* ed. by Fraser Watts, Rebecca Nye and Sara Savage (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 110-111; On spiritual struggle from a psychological perspective see Julie J Exline, 'Religious and Spiritual Struggles' in *APA Handbook of Psychology, Religion and Spirituality: Vol 1. Context, Theory and Research* ed. by K.I. Pargament (Washington: American Psychological Association 2013), pp. 459-75.

[39] Watts et al, *Psychology for Christian Ministry*, p. 111.

[40] Fowler, *Faith Development and Pastoral Care*, p. 109.

[41] Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon, 1967), p. 351.

[42] See for example Robert Davidson, *The Courage to Doubt* (London: SCM, 1983); John E. Colwell, *Why Have You Forsaken Me? A Personal Reflection on the Experience of Desolation* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster 2010); Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987); Walter Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1995).

> Communities are truly communities when they are open to others,
> when they remain vulnerable and humble; when the members are
> growing in love, in compassion and in humility. Communities
> cease to be such when members close in upon themselves with the
> certitude that they alone have wisdom and truth and expect
> everyone to be like them and learn from them. [43]

With this in mind, the goal of pastoral teaching must be to enable people to think beyond their own communities and theological preoccupations. Congregations and individuals can, however, even unconsciously, be resistant to learning and change due to 'the need to be right and the pain of learning'.[44] This can lead to an authoritarian and controlling environment, in which it is believed that unity equates to uniformity. The open-mindedness, and appreciation of difference which are the marks of Stage 5 are likely to be more conducive to the outward looking, self-sacrificial love which the New Testament associates with spiritual maturity. For this reason, Fowler suggests that Stage 5 is the 'modal level' at which congregations may operate, and that churches should aspire to it.[45] Whether this is possible will, of course, depend much on the kind of pastoral leadership in the community.

Pastors who have Stage 3 characteristics may find it difficult to guide their flocks beyond the immediate needs of the community. Even Stage 4 leaders who have had theological training may feel threatened by differences of opinion. As Osmer notes,

> it is not infrequent for persons in (Stage 4) to view themselves as
> the guardians of Christian truth and the true protectors of its
> genuine meaning. In their hands, the teaching office can become
> a club to beat into submission those who disagree or to ward off
> every challenge to the 'true' perspective.[46]

Authoritarianism of this sort can lead to a 'them and us' attitude in which cliques form. Those who comply may be seen as safe, 'good' Christians, and those who question as dangerous.[47] Those who share the leader's theological mind-set may become 'fat' (Ezek 34:20) on the teaching which appeals to them and the concomitant feeling of belonging, while others who do not share the view can be trampled over and excluded, even bullied. Jude 12, in a clear allusion to Ezekiel 34, warns against shepherds who are interested

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[43] Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth* Revised Edition (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1989), p. 19.

[44] John M. Hull, *What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning?* (Philadelphia, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1991), pp. 89-146.

[45] Fowler, *Faith Development and Pastoral Care*, p. 97.

[46] Osmer, *Teachable Spirit*, p. 248.

[47] Osmer, *Teachable Spirit*, p. 214.

only in feeding themselves, maintaining their position and exploiting others in the process.

In many respects, this kind of behaviour can be unconscious, and it takes integrity, self-awareness, and good peer support to be able to avoid these pitfalls. It is helpful for leaders to understand their own tendencies and default 'style' of expressing faith. For example, Fowler speaks of an 'orthodox' and 'progressive' temper. The orthodox temper tends to have 'rightness' and adherence to propositions at the heart of its ethos. It is less able to understand the 'progressive temper' which may, for example, not be so concerned with moral rightness as with matters such as social justice and environmentalism. [48] Of course, neither temper is right or wrong, and much depends on personality and life experience as to how they influence expression of faith. Nevertheless, pastors who have gone through a painful period of questioning and doubt, and have developed the appreciation of difference and paradox which are characteristic of Stage 5, are less likely to be controlling leaders and more able to cope with and even value differences of opinion.[49]

It is crucial, however, to remember that each stage has good and bad characteristics. The unquestioning trust of the child is good on one level, but can be dangerous at another. Strong community identity can provide nurturing environments which may at the same time be highly separatist. Those who have become convinced of their beliefs through enquiry and thought can, as we have seen, become controlling and intolerant of difference. The desire and ability to see both sides of the argument, which tends to be characteristic of Stage 5, is mostly healthy, but can lead to wooliness and uncertainty if not disciplined in some way. People at Stage 5 may be more able to empathize and serve those who are struggling with faith. On the other hand they may find it less easy to tolerate those whose views seem to them to be un-nuanced and dogmatic.

The fact is, of course, that churches are usually made up of a variety of people at various different stages, facing different struggles and life experiences, all of whom need pastoral guidance. The task of the pastor is to try to keep all these styles and stages of faith together, avoiding a monochrome congregation and encouraging an open-mindedness in which people can learn from each other. Some of this can be done through skilled and sensitive preaching, but this will not suit everyone, and it is helpful to

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[48] James W. Fowler, *Faithful Change: The Personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon 1996), pp. 165-71; see the discussion in David Lyall, *Integrity of Pastoral Care* (London: SCM 2001), pp. 108-134.

[49] Simon Oxley, 'Nurturing Conformity or Dissent: What is the Function of Christian Formation', *Journal of European Baptist Studies,* 14 (2014), pp. 34-46.

employ various teaching methods.[50] Fowler is clear that the pastor's role is not to try to force growth, but rather to encourage it. At each stage or style, those who are able should be encouraged to see that there are always different ways of looking at things, that there may be broader horizons than their own. And those who are ready and able, can be encouraged to start exploring and moving on.

Does this mean that all church leaders should be at Stage 5? Such an idea would be simplistic, impractical, and even dangerous. Quite apart from the value-judgement involved in making such an assessment, it suggests that people at other stages are unsuitable for leadership, which is not necessarily the case. Pastors, too, should continue to grow throughout their careers. It does suggest, though, that pastoral training and continuing professional education should aim to encourage pastors to seek, value, and develop the characteristics that foster co-operation and unity rather than separatism and dispute.

Conclusion

When Jesus instructs Peter to tend and feed the flock, he is giving him a heavy responsibility. Peter is to lead the church as it carries out Jesus' universal mission. For this, unity amongst believers is essential, and to this end Peter must care for their needs, keep them safe, and feed (teach) them. Feeding, however, is not simply for survival. There needs to be maturity of thinking and character, the hallmark of which is self-sacrificial love. Power struggles and selfish attitudes are symptomatic of immature faith which renders communities weak in times of trouble and ineffective in their task.

The pastor's duty of feeding the flock, then, entails an ability to provide a diet that enables healthy maturing. If teaching is limited to a mere reiteration of basic facts and discussion of practices (described as 'milk' by the writer to the Hebrews), communities are likely to remain immature and self-serving. The pastoral responsibility is to teach in a manner that will enable people to mature. Contemporary pastors can be helped in this task by judicious use of Fowler's insights, which, like the New Testament writers we have been examining here, suggest a close link between mature faith and the desire for unity.[51] An awareness of different faith stages and styles (including their own) can help pastors to tailor teaching to the needs of their flocks. Those at Stages 2-3 require 'milk'—the basic facts and stories of the faith. Those willing and able to move on to Stages 4 and 5 require what the biblical writers describe as 'solid food', exploring not only why certain beliefs are held, but helped to understand more of their significance for daily

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[50] *Pace* Sinclair Ferguson, 'Feeding the Flock of God', *Evangel,* 24 (2006), pp. 18-24.
[51] Fowler, *Faith Development and Pastoral Care*, p. 51.

life. The goal of teaching is to have mature churches characterized by self-sacrificial love which desires unity as a prerequisite for effective mission.

Self-sacrificing love, however, is risky for individuals and communities alike. There is the frightening obligation of foregoing our self-serving tendencies. Moreover, those who are growing into the 'full stature of Christ' are 'large targets', vulnerable not only to the temptations and doubts that beset every believer, but also to attack from those who fear or misunderstand them.[52] There is a need for shepherds who are able to take on the responsibility of nurturing the flock, keeping them together, and gathering in the strays. The task requires skill, courage, and humility.[53] It may even be dangerous, as it was for Peter himself. If today's disciples are to play their part in Jesus' universal mission, their pastors must be willing to become more like the 'Good Shepherd' who gave up his life for his sheep.

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[52] Daniel Jenkins, *Christian Maturity and the Theology of Success* (London: SCM, 1976), p. 21.
[53] Alastair V. Campbell, *Rediscovering Pastoral Care* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd,1981), pp. 26-36.

Yes, We Can: The Almost Forgotten Flipside of Discipleship

Henk Bakker

Introduction

When I met Parush for the first time, some ten years ago in Prague, it was immediately clear to me that this unique Bulgarian theologian was one of the strongest embodiments of anti-Platonism any person may ever engage in his life. Ever since, my basic feeling has only proven true, because the friendship that evolved from that first encounter was never simply a play with words, gestures, or abstract ideas, but real commitment covered with depth and warmth. To me Parush personifies a rare breed of Christian kinship that cannot be accused of having too much heaven on his mind, just because there are other things on his mind. Professor Parush's mind easily grasps the clarities as well as the mysteries of interdisciplinary research, the facts and fictions of both α and β sciences, and despite its critical orientation, is replete with unbroken spiritual integrity and hunger. This brings me automatically to the core question of this article concerning the 'thick of things' and the issue of incarnational discipleship. Regarding the Christian's vocation of discipleship, the critical question may be asked, whether discipleship is only a matter of obeisance. I use the following circumscription to rephrase the question. Does a true disciple of Jesus Christ merely obey his master or does he or she also participate with Christ in setting certain means and goals? My way of framing the question actually points to a predictable direction for sorting out the answer. That's right.

First, some explicit texts from the New Testament will be explored; subsequently the legacy of some major voices from early Christianity is taken into account; and finally the scope is broadened with listening to some contemporary Baptist voices.

The paradox

When Jesus announces his passion for the third time in the Gospel of Mark, the disciples James and John ask if they can sit at his right and left hand in the Kingdom of God, once the Kingdom commences. The other disciples are extremely upset with these brothers' request and reproach them.[1] However, the quarrel seems to be the very replay of the second announcement, because right after Jesus' second declaration the disciples start discussing the silly question which among the twelve is superior to the

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[1] Mark 10:32-37, 41.

others.[2] In both cases Jesus' reaction is quite radical: 'If anyone would be first, he must be [last of all and] servant of all'.[3] Moreover, the central passage that Mark inserts into the heart of his Gospel is the first announcement of Jesus' passion. The third announcement, as the most dramatic one, almost naturally flows forth from the first and central one. In any case, they stand connected.[4]

The sheer audacity fueling James and John to ask for a privileged seat in heaven emphasises their ignorance and incomprehension regarding Jesus' suffering. They, with Peter, had accompanied Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration,[5] and now they request to be invested with authority. Jesus confronts them, and returns this question to them:

> You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup
> that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am
> baptized? And they said to him, 'We are able.'[6]

Jesus' critical observation is that the Zebedean brothers do not understand the purport of their wish. They just do not know, because they cannot estimate the significance and the implications of Jesus' passion. Subsequently, Jesus asks them if they are able to suffer just like he will. He does not confront them with a double 'not'. Jesus does not say 'You do not know, and you are not able'. He merely expresses one 'not' and then the piercing question 'Are you able?' Any reader, and listener, intuitively feels that the question, without a doubt, is meant rhetorically. Obviously the brothers were not able, because they really did not know what they were asking.

However, the surprising remark of John and James points in the opposite direction. Their bold statement is, 'Yes, we can!' or 'Sure, we are able'.[7] Even more surprising is Jesus' reply, because suddenly he seems to deny any relation between royal positions in heaven and the amount of suffering. He affirms their role in the afflictions and tribulations ahead—actually, they will drink from Jesus' cup, and will share in his baptism—but then continues conveying that it is not his to grant special places in the

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[2] Mark 9:31-34.

[3] Mark 9: 35; 10:44.

[4] Mark 8:31-33. Cf. Howard Clark Kee, *Community of the New Age: Studies in Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1977), pp. 62-76. The three announcements hang together with the literary centre of the gospel in 8:31-9:8 (Peter's confession of Jesus, Peter's rebuke by Jesus, Peter's witness of Jesus' transfiguration).

[5] Mark 9:2-8.

[6] Mark 10:38-39a.

[7] Mark 10:39, Δυνάμεθα. Cf. Joel Marcus, *Mark 8-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary,* The Anchor Yale Bible (London: Yale University Press, 2009) ad loc.

Kingdom. Such seats were being prepared and reserved for dignitaries whose glory was granted from above.[8]

Although James and John have no certainty whatsoever about their future status, Jesus acknowledges their readiness to walk in his ways, even in the way of personal suffering and martyrdom. But how can they be so sure of themselves? No person really knows if he or she can persevere in trial and torture, and defy tyranny and terror. They can and cannot, and they will and will not. Both statements are true and contrary at the same time. Yes, they can and will; and yet, they cannot and will not. 'Yes' and 'yet' hold together. Moreover, Jesus adds to the paradox by concluding that they must learn to serve in order to become someone great. Even the King himself did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.[9]

Jesus refers to himself not only for the sake of clarity and instruction; his example of servanthood becomes the one and only standard for the Christian movement to go by. Altogether, this underscores the incapability of the Zebedean sons to guarantee their 'yes'. The 'yes' merely reflects feeble intentionality, not self-assurance and arrogant capability.

Participatory involvement

The ambivalence of the Marcan 'yes and yet' as related to participation in Jesus' suffering is subcutaneously embedded in New Testament thinking. Some curious examples may suffice to illustrate the rather obscure theological rationale. The first is taken from Paul's first (existent) letter to the Corinthian church, in which the apostle ironically defends himself against their self-complacency by belittling himself. The second example is also taken from Pauline thinking. In the letter to the Colossians the intriguing line catches the eye that Paul's own sufferings complete Christ's oppression for the benefit of the community. Finally some exploration of Petrine and Johannine thinking, specifically into 1 Peter and the Book of Revelation, are included. Both traditions add to the Pauline frame of mind, to follow Jesus as a participant who by his sufferings and commitment contributes to the spiritual care of the church and of the world.

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[8] Mark 10:39b-40.
[9] Mark 10:45, καὶ γὰρ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου οὐκ ἦλθεν διακονηθῆναι ἀλλὰ διακονῆσαι καὶ δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν.

Paul the Scapegoat (1 Cor. 4:13)[10]

In the first chapters of his first letter to the Corinthians [11] Paul confronts his readers with his indignant interrogatory style. [12] The apostle must defend himself against a group of Corinthians who question his apostolic authority. With sharp irony Paul sets out to corner the fraction. The group pretends to act as kings, while the apostle is assigned to lowest social status. [13] Subsequently, Paul summarises a few of the features of his destiny which are evidently hideous to the Corinthian mind: the lowest place as if condemned to death; a spectacle for the world, the angels and humanity; foolish, weak and dishonored; subjected to hunger, thirst, nakedness; beaten and condemned to a life of wandering; to undergo heavy physical labor as cursed, persecuted, and slandered. All the evil that he suffers is ultimately summarised in the sentence: 'We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things'. [14] However, with the pejorative indication 'refuse of all things' Paul may actually mean 'everyone's scapegoat'. [15]

In Late Antiquity those condemned to death were traditionally indicated by the scapegoat, because their blood flowed to appease the wrath of the gods and to pay for the sins of the people. The expression 'becoming a scapegoat' is associated with such Greek customs. In times of public disaster, lasting general misery could sometimes be avoided by throwing a condemned person into the sea. [16] The sacrifice of the victim was made in place of the many, [17] and therefore for the benefit of public well-being.

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[10] Cf. Henk Bakker, *Exemplar Domini: Ignatius of Antioch and his Martyrological Self-Concept* (University Groningen; Leuven: Peeters, 2003), pp. 182-187.

[11] See Henk Bakker, 'Towards an Evangelical Hermeneutic of Authority', forthcoming in *Essays Under the Auspices of the Center of Evangelical and Reformation Theology,* Vol. 2 (AmSTaR; Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2016).

[12] 1 Cor. 1:13, 20: 'Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? […]Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?', and 3:3, 5, 16: 'For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? […] What then is Apollos? What is Paul? […] Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?'

[13] 1 Cor. 4:7-8: 'What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it? Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich!'

[14] 1 Cor. 4:9-13. Cf. Gordon D Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 180.

[15] Gr. πάντων περίψημα. The word is a 'hapax legomenon' in the New Testament. Fee sets aside the translation of 1 Cor 4:13 as 'scapegoat', claiming that it is superfluous, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 180-181. Stählin, Barrett and Bruce do, indeed, translate περίψημα as such. Stählin even gives a step-by-step justification of the meaning 'scapegoat', *TDNT*, 6, pp. 90-91.

[16] See for references Stählin, *TDNT* 6, pp. 86-88, such as throwing a victim from the Leucadian cliff. See also Eusebius, *HE* 7, 17 and 7, 20-22 (Dionysius describes how Christians, with contempt for death, consoled victims of the plague. They 'took', as it were, the 'diseases on themselves', Dionysus claims, using the word περίψημα), and *Tobias* 5,19.

[17] Cf. mSanh 6, p. 2, those condemned to death say: 'May my death be a reconciliation for all of my sins'; 1QpHab 5, pp. 4-5. The notion that someone paid a death penalty for one's own sins is not foreign to Judaism, or to Greek religion; see J N Bremmer, 'Scapegoat Rituals in Ancient Greece', in R Buxton (ed.),

Conceived as such, when Paul refers to himself as a scapegoat condemned to death, he does not merely indicate that he is someone else's doormat.[18] He is, for humanity, more than just reprehensible—in fact, his death means that others may live.[19]

The early Christian bishop Ignatius of Antioch most probably copied Paul's unselfish attitude when he guaranteed the Ephesian Christians that his spirit is a 'worthless servant of the cross'.[20] If these words echo Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians in 4:13, the meaning goes beyond that of politeness or humbleness.[21] After all, Ignatius would consider himself a scapegoat like Paul did. This is certainly the case, because more echoes from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians can be found in the immediate context. First Corinthians 1-4 was undoubtedly Ignatius' inter-text when writing to the Ephesians.[22] So the comment, 'my spirit is a worthless servant of the cross' actually means that Ignatius considers himself to be a 'scapegoat of the cross', which signifies that by carrying his cross he offers himself for the benefit of others. In this sense, he is a scapegoat-along-with-Christ, and with Paul. Together they maintain that their sufferings somehow transcend a mere superficial meaning, and gain deep significance in the passion of Jesus.[23] Ignatius wrote: 'I endure everything only in the name of Jesus Christ in order to suffer with him',[24] and Paul wrote to the Colossians that his sufferings may even complete the oppressions of Christ.[25] A closer look at Paul's opinion will now follow.

Oxford Readings in Greek Religion (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 271-293, at p. 273 (περίψημα and περικαθάρμα both denoted a scapegoat [p. 276]; Paul uses both).

[18] περίκαθαρμα (round-purifying) can also mean 'ransom', see Proverbs 21:18 (LXX). Cf. *BDAG*, p. 801; F Hauck, *TDNT* 3, pp. 430-431; G Stählin, *TDNT* 6, pp. 84-93. So Lightfoot, Weiss, and also, cautiously, Barrett and Bruce. Gordon Fee carefully denies this possibility because of the weak argumentation, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 180.

[19] Cf. 2 Cor 4:12.

[20] Eph 18,1, περίψημα, or: 'with my spirit, I am of humble service to the cross'.

[21] Cf. *Barn* 4,9; 6,5; Eusebius, *HE* 7,22,7. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch. A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1985), p. 64 ('At the same time, however, the language does not reflect merely polite self-effacement') and Bauer-Paulsen, *Apostolische Väter*, Vol. 2, p. 34, make note of this characteristic. See also Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, Vol. 2, part 2, pp. 50-51.

[22] Cf. Eph 16,2 and 1 Cor 1:23; 2:2, 8; Eph 17,1 and 1 Cor 2:6; Eph 17,2 and 1 Cor 1:21a, 24 (see also 1 Cor 1:18; 2:12); Eph 18,1a and 1 Cor 4:13; Eph 18,1b and 1 Cor 1:18; Eph18,1c and 1 Cor 1:20.

[23] Cf. Eph 16,2 (and Eph 1,2; Sm 2,1; 7,1; Tr 2,1); Sm 4,2; Tr 10,1; 12,2; Ro 4,1; Pol 3,1. It is probably for this reason that he was given the name Θεοφόρος ('bearer of God', see *MartSIgn* 2,4-7). Ignatius' second name has been the occasion for a discussion about the place of accents: should it be read as θεοφόρος ('bearer of God') or θεόφορος ('borne by God')? The series of compound words in Eph 9,2 makes the first reading the most acceptable. The second reading is only supported by the tradition that Ignatius was supposedly the child that Jesus, according to Mark 9:36 embraced; see Symeon Metaphrastes, *PG* 114, col. 1269. Ignatius probably received or created the name himself. It is a pre-eminent name for a martyr in whom Christ's passion is fully revealed.

[24] Sm 4,2.

[25] Ignatius could have known the Epistle to the Colossians: compare Tr 5,2 with Col 1:16, and Eph 10,2 with Col 1:23.

Filling Up What Is Lacking (Col. 1:24)[26]

Paul himself, or someone from his circle,[27] proposes in Colossians 1:24 that the apostle's own physical suffering 'completes' Christ's oppressions for the benefit of the community: 'Now I rejoice in suffering for you and complete with my body the oppressions of Christ that are [still] wanting for the benefit of His body, that is the church'.

The sentence does not stand alone, but is flanked on both sides by 'I have become a servant', at the end of verse 23 and at the beginning of verse 25.[28] The joy of the Pauline author over suffering for the gospel and the church can be understood, in the context of this *inclusio*, as the accomplishment of his calling and duty. The indication 'now' must not be read as an indication of time, but as a determination of given conditions.[29] The author rejoices in being allowed to suffer under current circumstances (in prison) for the community, since the task is one granted to him by God.[30] The suffering occurs on behalf of the church,[31] because it completes Jesus' sacrifice and directs the faithful to unity.[32] Inflictions, sent by God's enemies, which ultimately prove to be damaging and even fatal, are used by God to summon the churches to keep the peace.

Therefore, by virtue of his individual calling, the author says that Paul completes in prison what remains of Christ's torment on behalf of the Christian community. The verb ἀνταναπληροῦν expresses the act of substituting something in place of what is missing.[33] The writer, consequently, has Paul appear as Christ's substitute.[34] The absence, that must be completed, is indicated by ὑστερήματα.[35] The partitive genitive τῶν θλίψεων stipulates exactly what is missing. In J B Lightfoot's opinion, Paul means to say that Jesus left some of the task of suffering undone in order to

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[26] See Henk Bakker, *Exemplar Domini*, pp. 115-119.

[27] Paul, or one of the Pauline circle, may be the author of the Epistle to the Colossians. Cf. J M G Barclay, *Colossians and Philemon*, NT Guides (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), pp.18-36.

[28] 'the Gospel [...] of which I, Paul, have become a servant. Now, I rejoice in suffering for you, and complete with my body the oppressions of Christ that are wanting for the benefit of His body, that is the community, of which I have become a servant', Col 1:23b-24.

[29] See *BDAG*, pp. 681-682.

[30] Cf. Acts 9:16.

[31] See J B Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*, (Lynn, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1981, repr. 1868), p. 75.

[32] Cf. P T O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians. A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 304-306.

[33] See J Kremer, *Was an dem Leiden Christi noch mangelt. Eine interpretationsgeschichtliche und exegetische Untersuchung zu Kol. 1,24b* (Bonn, 1956) 161, 167-168: 'Paulus *ersetzt* etwas, was Christus nicht leistete'.

[34] Cf. J Gnilka, *Der Kolosserbrief* (Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 10.1; Freiburg-Basel-Wien, 1980) 98.

[35] Cf. Phil 2:30, 'for the sake of Christ's work he was near death, because he ventured his life to complete your insufficiency in service of me'.

let the apostle complete it,[36] by which he does not in any way feel that Jesus' redemptive work was unaccomplished.[37]

The designated oppressions are not limited to Jesus' earthly passion. The subjective genitive τοῦ Χριστοῦ also makes Christ the subject of the torments that his substitutes undergo. The suffering of a substitute is qualified as the continued suffering of Christ in him.[38] Christ reveals that he is suffering in the suffering of the church, as Paul's Damascus conversion had already indicated to him.[39] Jesus' passion also continued in Paul himself when he was forbidden to preach, according to Col 1:24.[40] In this way the apostle participated in Jesus' suffering.[41] In a similar way the early Christian author Eusebius describes the martyrdom of the deacon Sanctus (2nd c.). Jesus suffered and gained great victory in Sanctus' mutilated body.[42]

Thus, the representative nature of Paul's suffering extends in two directions. On the one hand, the apostle represents the community; on the other hand, he appears like Jesus. Both dimensions flow together insofar as Paul's suffering is concerned.[43] There is a vital connection displayed with the community of believers as well as with Christ, the head of the Church. Paul particularly bridges the life stream of God by his sufferings.

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[36] Lightfoot, *Colossians & Philemon*, p. 165. The oppressions can be explained eschatologically: Paul must suffer the necessary persecutions before the end arrives, as suggested by M Dibelius, and also by E Lohse, *Die Briefe an die Kolosser und an Philemon* (KEK, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1968), pp. 112-117.

[37] Such is also the view of R G Bratcher and E A Nida, *A Translators Handbook on Paul's Letters to the Colossians and Philemon* (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1977), p. 37.

[38] Cf. Chrysostom, *Homiliae in ep. ad Col. 1,24* (*PG* 62, col. 326-327), 'And what things I suffer, I suffer, he saith, on His account: not to me, therefore express your gratitude, but to him, for it is He Himself who suffers [...] So that He is not ashamed to call these sufferings also his own. For He did not only die for us, but even after His death He is ready to be afflicted for your sakes. He is eagerly and vehemently set upon showing that He is even now exposed to peril in His own Body for the Church's sake [...] what things He should have suffered, I suffer instead of Him' (trans. by J A Broadus, *NPNF* 13, 276).

[39] Acts 9:4.

[40] Col 1:24 and 25 are parallel sentences. See M Cahill, 'The Neglected Parallelism in Colossians 1,24-25', *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 68 (1992), pp. 142-147.

[41] See M D Hooker, 'Interchange and Suffering', in W Horbury, B McNeil (eds.), *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament. Studies Presented to G.M. Styler by the Cambridge New Testament Seminar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 70-83, at 82: 'Colossians 1:24 reflects the conviction [...], that it is necessary for the Christian to share in the sufferings of Christ and that this participation in suffering can be of benefit to other members in the Christian community'; cf. the same author's 'Interchange in Christ', *JTS* 22 (1971), pp. 349-361, and 'Interchange and Atonement', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 60 (1978), pp. 462-481. See also W F Flemington, 'On the Interpretation of Colossians 1:24', in Horbury, McNeill (eds.), *Suffering and Martyrdom*, pp. 84-90. Flemington argues that Paul did not suffer on behalf of Jesus or the church.

[42] Eusebius, *HE* 5,1,23, 'in whom the suffering Christ achieved great glory'.

[43] This is the classical view of Col 1:24; see J Ernst, *Die Briefe an die Philipper, an Philemon, an die Kolosser, an die Epheser*, Regenburger Neues Testament (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1974), pp. 183-187; and G Delling, *TDNT* 6, p. 307; additionally, M Barth and H Blanke, *Colossians. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary,* trans. by Astrid Beck, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1994); and E Schweizer, *Der Brief an die Kolosser*, EKK 2 (Zürich: Benziger Verlag, 1976), pp. 81-86. Cf. K T Kleinknecht, *Der leidende Gerechtfertigte. Die alttestamentlich-jüdische Tradition vom 'leidenden Gerechten' und ihre Rezeption bei Paulus*, WUNT, 2/13 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1984), pp. 376-386 (Jesus' and Paul's suffering are indeed analogous, but only the first one is spiritually edifying).

In the New Testament this idea of suffering characterises not only Pauline thinking, but also the spiritual frame of Petrine theology and Johannine theology.

Sharing in Christ's Suffering (1 Pet. 4:13)

In the first letter of Peter the battered church throughout the Jewish dispersion is summoned to 'rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings'.[44] Christians should not be shocked by the way they are being treated by the world, such as being slandered and socially marginalized, because this is an indication of their identification with Jesus, who endured all this.[45] Christians suffer for the sake of their identification and unity with Christ and enter into the experience of Christ's own sufferings, however, not in a salvific sense. Misery in the footsteps of Jesus creates a re-imaging of one's own suffering, so as to be part of a greater and more extended story.[46]

Stories of persecuted Christians cannot be isolated to a merely individual or personal level. They transcend limited biographical horizons, because they feed and inform the story of Jesus' passion that crosses the boundaries of time and place through the Spirit of God. Henceforth, the story of Peter as one of the foremost disciples of Jesus is also firmly structured in the larger fabric of Jesus' persistent coming to the world, before his death as well as after his death. For example, in Matthew's Gospel the person of Peter receives paradigmatic overtones, so as to become the disciple par excellence, an archetypal figure for every disciple of Jesus to copy and learn from.[47] Therefore, Peter's confessions, failures, and agonies are all taken up in Jesus' pathway to the cross; in his shadow every disciple's cross-bearing can be seen.[48]

In the Gospel of John too, the person of Peter is highlighted in a rather special way. On several occasions Peter expressed his readiness to follow Jesus ('yes, I can'), yet he could not, and even would not.[49] After Peter's dramatic failure, Jesus restored and rehabilitated him, sealing the memoires of John by hinting at Peter's pending martyrdom.[50] This remarkable moment

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[44] 1 Pet. 4:13: 'But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings [ἀλλὰ καθὸ κοινωνεῖτε τοῖς τοῦ Χριστοῦ παθήμασιν χαίρετε], that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed'. See F V Filson, 'Partakers with Christ: Suffering in First Peter', *Interpretation* 9 (1955), pp. 400-412.

[45] See Peter H Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter,* NICNT (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990), pp. 163-167.

[46] Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 166.

[47] On the person of Peter in Matthew's Gospel, see M J Wilkins, *The Concept of Disciple in Matthew's Gospel. As Reflected in the Use of the Term Μαθητής*, SNT 59 (Leiden: Brill, 1988).

[48] Mt. 16:16-19, 22-23; 26:33-35, 69-75.

[49] John 13:36-38.

[50] John 18:10-11, 25-27; 21:7, 15-19.

happened after the resurrection, and after the symbolic outpouring of the Spirit by Jesus breathing on his disciples.[51]

So far, the Petrine portrait of discipleship as constructed from just a few New Testament texts is quite coherent. It tells the story of a feeble yet robust follower of Jesus whose sufferings were gently enveloped in the overall story of Jesus, both before and after Easter.

The Testimony of Jesus (Rev. 6-21; 19:10)

The final New Testament text to be taken into consideration is Revelation 19:10, the very moment of John's uneasy tribute to the mighty angel, just before the closing scene of the victorious wedding-feast of the Lamb is about to happen.[52] As John falls down on his knees to worship the messenger of God, the angel reproaches him to worship God alone, 'for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy' [ἡ γὰρ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ ἐστιν τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς προφητείας].[53] The words of the angel re-focus John on the core issue at stake in the divine scroll: the evolving revelation to the spirit of prophecy.

The angel introduces himself to John as a fellow bondservant who holds 'the testimony of Jesus' [τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ]. This reference to the testimony of Jesus should probably be taken as a reminder of Jesus' personal faithfulness under critical circumstances.[54] True prophecy, then, is qualified (and legitimised!) by actual partaking in Jesus' suffering, as co-heirs of the Lamb demonstrate by their personal testimony.[55] John, too, is a prophetic witness, whose calling is to suffer as any other witness of Christ.[56] As John becomes gradually aware, the blood of God's witnesses is participative with the blood of Christ on a sub-surface level.[57] However, John is not the only one called to hear and obey the prophetic word of God. The church, too, is compelled to surrender itself to the care of 'the God of the spirits of the prophets', as John states in his final chapter.[58]

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[51] John 20:21-23.

[52] Henk Bakker, '"So On Earth": Liturgy From Heaven', lecture at the Symposium of the Centre for Patristic Research, *Prayer and Mystagogy in the Early Church*, Utrecht, August 27th 2014, forthcoming in second CPO volume on early Christian Mystagogy.

[53] Rev. 19:10.

[54] Cf. Rev. 1:2, 5, 9; 3:14; 11:3, 7.

[55] Rev. 12:11: 'They overcame him because of the Lamb's blood and because of the word of their testimony' (διὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς μαρτυρίας αὐτῶν).

[56] Rev. 1:9; 10:10-11.

[57] Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation,* New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 75-76, 79. John's revelation expounds three pivotal themes: the messianic war, the eschatological exodus, and Christian witness, according to Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, pp. 67-73.

[58] Rev. 22:6 (ὁ θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων τῶν προφητῶν). Cf. 19:10 (τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς προφητείας) and 1 Cor. 14:32 (αἱ πνεύματα προφητῶν προφήταις ὑποτάσσεται).

Christians and Maccabeans

Any belief formative of early Christian martyrology reaches back to seminal source texts emanating from earliest apostolic times. Reading Ignatius of Antioch one cannot but compare Ignatian thinking with Pauline or other New Testament patterns of thought. There are just too many similarities to ignore basic comparative study. Early Christian martyrology builds on the apostolic sentiments of communal life, which consist mainly of well-established concepts of Jewish spirituality. Much of this is found in late pre-Christian Jewish literature and of course in related literature rapidly emerging in the nascent Christian era.

Participative suffering

Illustrative is the telling story of the seven Maccabean brothers who suffered martyrdom in Jerusalem c. 167 BC under the tyranny of the Syrian king Antioch IV Epiphanes.[59] The account of the execution in the book of *4 Maccabees* is highly hagiographic,[60] though there must be a historical core that launched the tradition, as is more plausible in the book of *2 Maccabees* 6,18-31 and 7,1-42.[61] However, the Jewish tract *4 Maccabees* probably originated in the first half of the first century AD (maybe 39 AD), and was popular among Christians.[62] In Christian circles the Maccabean martyrs were more or less considered Christians. Their remains were even kept in a synagogue that was later purchased by the Christian community in the city of Antioch.[63]

The Maccabean martyrs were national heroes who, for the author, symbolically represent the true spirit of the Jewish people. Therefore, in *4 Maccabees* much attention is given to the account of the suppression of the Jews of Jerusalem (*4 Macc.* 4), the martyrdom of the old sage Eleazar (*4*

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[59] See Bakker, *Exemplar Domini*, pp. 108-115.

[60] In *4*, the reader is probably dealing with an encomiastic funeral oration composed to celebrate the death day *Macc* of the Maccabean martyrs. See 3,19, the funeral text in 17,8-10, and also 17, 18.20. Cf. J C H Lebram, 'Die literarische Form des vierten Makkabäerbuches', *VC* 28 (1974])88, and P L Redditt, 'The Concept of *Nomos* in Fourth Maccabees', *CBQ* 45 (1983) pp. 249-270 at pp. 264, 267.

[61] Jonathan Goldstein, *II Maccabees*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1983), pp. 297-299.

[62] Bakker, *Exemplar Domini*, pp. 213-216.

[63] Cf. M Schatkin, 'The Maccabean Martyrs', *VC* 28 (1974), pp. 97-113; J Obermann, 'The Sepulchre of the Maccabean Martyrs', *JBL* 50 (1931), pp. 250-265; J Jeremias, 'Die Makkabäer-Kirche in Antiochia', *ZNW* 40 (1942), pp. 254-255; W A Meeks, R L Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the First Four Centuries of the Common Era* (*SBLSBS 13;* Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978) 3; L Rutgers, 'The Importance of Scripture in the Conflict Between Jews and Christians: the Example of Antioch', in L V Rutgers, P W van der Horst, H W Havelaar, L Teugels (eds.), *The Use of Sacred Books in the Ancient World*: Contributions to biblical exegesis and theology 22 (Leuven: Peeters, 1998) pp. 287-303, at pp. 290, 298-299; D A de Silva, *4 Maccabees*: *Guides to Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), p. 23, and W Horbury, 'The Cult of Christ and the Cult of the Saints', *NTS* 44 (1998), pp. 444-469.

Macc. 5-7), the seven brothers (*4 Macc.* 8-13), and their mother (*4 Macc.* 14-17,6). The author closes by revealing the consequences of the martyrdoms (*4 Macc.* 17,7-18,5), and the mother's address to her children (*4 Macc.* 18,6-19).

The Maccabean martyr story displays a drastic shift in the traditional (and prevalent) Deuteronomistic vision of faith so that it strongly agrees with the salvation doctrine characteristic of Paul's and Ignatius' view of Jesus' death. *4 Maccabees* could have had direct influence on the soteriological mindset of Ignatius.[64]

The nine martyrs did not die for themselves but for the benefit of the entire Jewish nation, which had sinned in following the high priest Jason. He introduced Greek customs and, consequently, caused the neglect of Jewish law. Since a considerable portion of the population went along with this change,[65] God's wrath was ignited and dictatorship established.[66] However, *2 Maccabees* implies more strongly than *4 Maccabees* that the martyrs themselves were personally inflicted with guilt. In *2 Maccabees*, they are part of the population and identify with its collective guilt and punishment.[67] Therefore, the youngest son expresses the hope that their death would result in reconciliation with God.[68] In *2 Maccabees* martyrdom does not have any substitutionary significance. The martyrs represent the people, participate in their very sins, and expect that the blood of a faithful few (a remnant) will appease God's anger.[69] This is obviously a matter of corporative representation.

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[64] So O Perler, 'Das vierte Makkabäerbuch, Ignatius von Antiochien und die ältesten Martyrerberichte', *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana* 25 (1949), pp. 47-72, and W H C Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church. A Study of a Conflict From the Maccabees to Donatus* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), p. 199; 'The Persecutions: Some Links between Judaism and the Early Church', *JEH* 9 (1958),n pp. 141-158, at p.151. See also Henk Bakker, *Ze hebben lief, maar worden vervolgd. Radicaal christendom in de tweede eeuw en nu* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2006³) pp. 55-74.

[65] *2 Macc* 4,13-15.

[66] 'Because of these things, they were beset with grievous torments, and they discovered their enemies and avengers in those men whose ways of living they had copied and who they had wished to imitate in every way', *2 Macc* 4,16, and: 'For this reason, the Just Divinity was enraged and caused Antiochus to fight them personally', *4 Macc* 4,21.

[67] See *2 Macc* 5,17-20; 6,12-16, especially the orations given by the sixth and seventh sons (7,18: 'for we suffer these things for our own sake, because we have sinned against our God'; 7,32: 'for we suffer for our own sins'). Cf. M de Jonge, 'Jesus' Death For Others and the Death of the Maccabean Martyrs', in T Baarda, A Hilhorst, G P Luttikhuizen, A.S. van der Woude (eds.), *Text and Testimony. Essays in honour of A F J Klijn* (Kampen: Kok, 1988), pp. 142-151, at p. 148.

[68] *2 Macc* 7,33.38: 'But if our living Lord is, for a short while, enraged and metes out reprimand and punishment, He will also be reconciled with his servants [...] and that the Almighty's anger even with me and my brothers, that has justifiably been wrought on our entire race, may be quieted'. For a discussion of these texts, see especially J W van Henten, 'Das jüdische Selbstverständnis in den ältesten Martyrien', in J W van Henten, B A G M Dehandschutter, H J W. van der Klaauw (eds.), *Die Entstehung der jüdischen Martyrologie*, Studia Post-Biblica 38 (Leiden: Brill, 1989), pp. 127-161 at p. 142.

[69] Cf. D Powers, *Salvation Through Participation. An Examination of the Notion of the Believer's Corporate Unity with Christ in Early Christian Soteriology* (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), pp. 199-211, at pp. 210-211. Cf. Kleinknecht, *Der leidende Gerechtfertigte*, 127-129, and J N Bremmer, 'The Atonement in the Interaction of Jews, Greeks, and Christians', in J N Bremmer, F García Martínez (eds.), *Sacred History*

Vicarious suffering is, consequently, foreign to Jewish thought, for everyone participates in the same collective problem of sin.[70] A condemned man dies, in the first place, because of his own guilt, and pays for his own sins.[71] As such, through suffering, all personal guilt is expiable.[72] Besides suffering, intercessory prayer may atone as well.[73]

Substitutionary suffering

4 Maccabees is different from *2 Maccabees*, as notions of representation and participation are placed further in the background. The author allowed himself to be, indeed, inspired by *2 Maccabees* (possibly 7,38), but emphasises more the innocence of the martyrs and, as a result, directly implies the substitutive nature of their death. It is precisely as a result of their innocence that their death can be viewed as a vicarious offering.[74] Eleazar refers to his obedience to the law and subsequently expresses the wish that his execution may be a satisfaction for the sins of his people: 'let our punishment suffice for them.'[75] Apparently, the martyr can make this

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and Sacred Texts in Early Judaism. A Symposium in Honour of A.S. van der Woude, Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 5 (Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1992), pp. 75-93, at p. 79.

[70] Cf. J W van Henten, *The Maccabean Martyrs as Saviours of the Jewish People. A Study of 2 & 4 Maccabees*, JSJSup 57 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), p. 160; E P Sanders, 'R. Akiba's View of Suffering', *JQR* 63 ('72/'73) pp. 332-351, at p. 333; G Bertram, *TDNT* 5, pp. 617-618. *Contra* R J Daly, *Christian Sacrifice. The Judaeo-Christian Background Before Origen*, The Catholic University of America Studies in Christian Antiquity 18 (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 1978), pp. 125-127, pp. 149-150.

[71] A person condemned to death, on the way to the place of execution, receives the opportunity to utter the following words: 'may my death be an atonement for all my sins', mSanh 6,2. Cf. SifNum 112, 'all who die are reconciled in death'. Cf. A P O'Hagan, 'The Martyr in the Book of Maccabees', *SBF* 24 (1974) pp. 105-106; E Lohse, *Märtyrer und Gottesknecht; Untersuchungen zur urchristlichen Verkündigung vom Sühntod Jesu Christi*, Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments N.F. 46 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1955), pp. 211-213.

[72] Cf. Sifre on Deuteronomy, par. 307, on Deut 32:4 [133a]. R. Haninah ben Teradion is about to be burned along with his scrolls. He himself, his wife and daughter respond to the tragic news by citing Deut 32:4 :'The Rock, His works are righteous.' Neusner's commentary on this passage is: 'It shows that the saints attained their sainthood by knowing how to accept and to justify God's decree concerning them', J Neusner, *Sifre to Deuteronomy; An Analytical Translation*, Vol. 2: *Pisqaot One Hundred Forty-Four through Tree Hundred Fifty-Seven*, Brown Judaic Studies 101 (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1987) p. 320. Cf. Dan 3:27-31, 37, 39 (LXX; Azarja praises God for His righteousness, for His punishment is just, in Rahlfs, Vol 2, p. 887), *Treaty of Shem* 8 (in Charlesworth, *OTP*, Vol. 1, pp. 484-485), and 1QpHab 5,4-6. See also E Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, Vol. 3.1, revised ed. by G Vermes and F Millar (Edinburgh: T&T Clark: 1987), pp. 369-372.

[73] Such as Moses' intercessory prayer in Ex 31:31-32, Job's prayer for his friends in Job 42:7-8, and Peter's prayer for Simon in Acts 8:23-24. Cf. *1 En* 47,1-4; *2 Macc* 3,31-32; *4 Macc* 4,12-14. See also Josephus, *JW* 2,197.

[74] De Silva, *4 Maccabees*, 137-141, at 141; another view is provided by D Seeley, *The Noble Death. Graeco-Roman Martyrology and Paul's Concept of Salvation* (JSNTSup 28; Sheffield: JSOT Presse, 1990), pp. 83-99. Cf. Bremmer, 'The Atonement in the Interaction of Jews, Greeks, and Christians', 86-87: 'we now find a clear theology of an "effective death"'.

[75] ἀρκεσθεὶς τῇ ἡμετέρᾳ ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν δίκῃ, *4 Macc* 6,28.

request to God, because he is not to be blamed. He has, in consequence, something unreal about him.[76]

The same applies to the martyrdom of rabbi Akiba in 137 AD. Although the account of his martyrdom is unreal, and therefore, disputed,[77] the utterances attributed to Akiba can be used to sketch a picture of his vision of suffering. It is said of Akiba that he severed the theological connection between suffering and the commission of sins.[78] Suffering may also be accepted as a consequence of loving God. As a result, Akiba broke with the Pharisean-rabbinic view that suffering must be a punishment for the commission of sins. His death set an example,[79] and in the course of the second century the exemplary character of suffering and love gradually displaced the idea of retribution. Martyrdom could then be seen as a model for the perseverance of human love towards God.[80] It should also be noted here that the doctrine of vicarious suffering does indeed develop in the margin of first century Jewish thought.

In *4 Maccabees* martyrs stand closer to God and farther away from the people than in *2 Maccabees*. They unilaterally build a bridge from the realm of God to humanity and provide substitutive satisfaction, forgiveness, and atonement.[81] Corporative representation and participation are not absent, but their importance is reduced because martyrs are considered to represent the Divine more than the human. By their sacrifice, a new age of restored devotion to God ('Zuwendung Gottes') dawns, in which people can spiritually be renewed and the law placed in honor again.

It is unthinkable that this Jewish political awakening went unnoticed in Christian communities.[82] Possibly, *4 Maccabees* was already accepted in Christian-Jewish circles at the beginning of the sixth decade of the first century AD. Shortly after that time, the Antiochian church annexed *4 Maccabees* and the Maccabean martyrs as a Christian book and as Christian heroes.[83] The concept of vicarious atonement could be easily incorporated

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[76] Cf. T Baumeister, *Die Anfänge der Theologie des Martyriums*, MBT 45 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1980), p. 50.

[77] See S Zeitlin, 'The Legend of the Ten Martyrs and its Apocalyptic Origins', *JQR* 36 (1945/1946), pp. 1-16, pp. 209-210.

[78] Cf. *Mekilta Mispatîm* 18; *Sanhedrin* 14a and 101a; *Berakoth* 61b; *Semahoth* 8,9; *Abodah Zarah* 17b. See E E Urbach, *The Sages. Their Concepts and Beliefs*, Vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1979), pp. 433, 442-447, 501.

[79] Cf. *Semahoth* 8,9, or 'proof', 'confirmation', 'wonder'.

[80] Cf. *Mekilta Mispatîm* 18; *Sanhedrin* 101a en 14a; *Berakoth* 61b; *Semahoth* 8,9; *Abodah Zarah* 17b.

[81] Cf. Seeley, *The Noble Death*, p. 111. Cf. Lampe, 'Martyrdom and Inspiration', in Horbury and McNeil, *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament*, p. 121: 'the death of the martyr effects atonement for Israel by expiating the people's sins or propitiating the wrath of God'.

[82] See A Hilhorst, 'Fourth Maccabees in Christian Martyrdom Texts', in C Kroon, D den Hengst (eds.), *Ultima Aetas. Time, Tense and Transience in the Ancient World. Studies in Honour of Jan den Boeft* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2000) pp. 107-121, at p. 118. *4 Macc* had a 'strong, if inconspicuous, impact' on Christian literature.

[83] Cf. D F Winslow, 'The Maccabean Martyrs: Early Christian Attitudes', *Judaism* 23 (1974), pp. 78-86, at p. 86.

into Christian thought. As a suffering prophet and martyr, Jesus was, after all, thought to side and stand with God. By Paul, Jesus' death is explained as a bloody sacrifice in atonement to God: 'Him did God present as an atoning sacrifice by his blood through faith' (Rom 3:25, ὃν προέθετο ὁ θεὸς ἱλαστήριον διὰ [τῆς] πίστεως ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι). With these same words, the author of *4 Maccabees* explains that: 'By the blood of these pious men, and by the expiatory sacrifice of their death, Divine Providence has granted the previously mistreated Israel salvation' (*4 Maccabees* 17,22, διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν εὐσεβῶν ἐκείνων καὶ τοῦ ἱλαστηρίου τοῦ θανάτου αὐτῶν ἡ θεία πρόνοια τὸν Ισραηλ προκακωθέντα διέσωσεν). The manner in which *4 Maccabees* speaks about substitutionary atonement resembles the way in which the apostle Paul and Ignatius speak of it. Perhaps the tract had an effect on Christian conceptualisation of the events surrounding Jesus' death.[84]

Origen and the Maccabean Nine

Interestingly, the church fathers Origen and Cyprian refer extensively to the Maccabean heroes in their exhortations to the Christian martyrs, as if these Jewish martyrs were vital examples for the Christians to live by.[85] Origen's objective is to have the martyr's mind preserved in utter calmness of soul. Yet the reality of tribunal and torture, of course, is as disquieting and uprooting as can be. Therefore, he inserted instructive narratives of martyrdom into his address to martyrs (*Exhortatio ad martyrium*, c. 235 AD), taken 'from Scripture' as he says.[86] However, the lauded examples were taken from *2 Maccabees* and *4 Maccabees*.[87] According to Origen,

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[84] According to J C O'Neill, the inspiration for this conception came from Jesus Himself, 'Did Jesus teach that his death would be vicarious as well as typical?, in Horbury, McNeill (eds.), *Suffering and Martyrdom*, p. 11. See also W Nauck, 'Freude im Leiden. Zum Problem einer urchristlichen Verfolgungstradition', *ZNW* 46 (1955) pp. 66-80, at p. 79: 'Die Tradition über die Freude im Verfolgungsleiden hat im Judentum ihren historischen Sitz im Leben höchstwahrscheinlich in der Situation der Fromme zur Zeit Makkabäerkämpfe'. Cf. E Weiner, A Weiner, *The Martyr's Conviction. A Sociological Analysis*, Brown Judaic Studies 203 (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1990), pp. 27-48, and the discussion in Bremmer, 'The Atonement in the Interaction of Jews, Greeks, and Christians', pp. 75-93. According to Kleinknecht, Paul's thinking is dominated by the tradition of the 'suffering righteous', a tradition unrelated to the Deuteronomistic tradition, but that often developed in analogous ways. The apostle also presents himself as a suffering righteous man, and as such, participates in Jesus' passion; see *Der leidende Gerechtfertigte*, pp. 365-376.

[85] Henk Bakker, 'A Martyr's Pain is Not Pain: Mystagogical Directives in Tertullian's *Ad martyras*, Origen's *Exhortatio ad martyrium*, and Cyprian's *Epistula ad Fortunatum de exhortatione martyrii*', forthcoming in Paul van Geest (ed.), *Seeing Through the Eyes of Faith: The Mystagogy of the Church Fathers*, Late Antique History and Religion 10 (Leuven: Peeters, 2015).

[86] Origen, *Exhortatio ad martyrium* 27,11 (ἀπὸ τῆς Γραφῆς).

[87] Origen used the text of *2 Maccabees* extensively. However, *4 Maccabees* was also at his disposal; see David A deSilva, 'An Example of How to Die Nobly For Religion: The Influence of *4 Maccabees* on Origen's *Exhortatio ad Martyrium*', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 17/3 (2009), pp. 337-356; Hilhorst, 'Fourth Maccabees in the Christian Martyrdom Texts', 107-121; Jan Willem van Henten, 'The Christianization of the Maccabean Martyrs: the Case of Origen', in J Leemans (ed.), *Martyrdom and Persecution in Late Antique Christianity: Festschrift Boudewijn Dehandschutter*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 241 (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), pp. 333-351, at pp. 340-343.

these Maccabean martyrs did embody the very demeanour of Christian martyrdom par excellence. [88] The nine martyrs, in fact, passed away in Christian calmness of mind. At the closing of the Maccabean story, Origen recapitulates the lesson of the tale as he saw it: 'that we may see how much power against the harshest sufferings and the deepest tortures there is in religion and in the spell of love for God'. [89]

Cyprian and the Maccabean sage

Some twenty years after Origen's letter, Bishop Cyprian wrote his exhortation to martyrdom addressed to Fortunatus (*Epistula ad Fortunatum de exhortatione martyrii*, 252 or 257 AD). [90] Under the 11th heading Matthew 24 is extensively quoted, and furthermore these Scripture verses are completed by a triumphant parade of faithful believers, Daniel and Tobias, then the Maccabean nine—the brothers, their mother, and Eleazar— and finally a multitude of martyrs taken from the book of Revelation 7:9. The violent death of the Maccabean martyrs is outlined in detail. But Cyprian's narrative differs in many a detail from Origen's text.
Cyprian, more than Origen, aims at proving the Maccabean examples to be forerunners of the church.

Moreover, Cyprian reverses the sequence of events as he found it in *2 Maccabees* and *4 Maccabees*, starting off with the seven sons and their mother, and bringing to a close the eleventh chapter with the awesome example of the Maccabean sage Eleazar. To be sure, to Cyprian the demeanour of the person of Eleazer was most instructive and appealing. Cyprian reports that the devout Eleazar decisively refused to just pretend or feign obedience to the king, for he wished not to deceive or misguide the tyrant. Deceiving the king, in this respect, would be deemed an offence against God. Henceforth, imitating Eleazar's piety in Cyprian's days would definitely imply full disqualification of secretly purchasing a so-called *libellus*, attempting to fool the imperial system by pretence.

According to Cyprian, only the brave and steadfast mind, founded in religious meditations was able to endure. [91] Adequate spiritual preparation for suffering and passion, then, is to be found in the calmness and bravery of a pious mind, such as admired in the Maccabean nine: 'if we make our way

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[88] See Van Henten, 'The Christianization of the Maccabean Martyrs, pp. 336, 349-351.

[89] εὐσέβεια καὶ τὸ πρὸς θεὸν φίλτρον, Origen, *Exhortatio* 27.

[90] For introductory bibliography on Cyprian see Henk Bakker, Paul van Geest, Hans van Loon (eds.), 'Introduction: Cyprian's Stature and Influence', in Henk Bakker, Paul van Geest, Hans van Loon (eds.), *Cyprian of Carthage: Studies in His Life, Language, and Thought*, Late Antique History and Religion 3 (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), pp. 1-27, and C H Turner, 'Prolegomena to the *Testimonia* and *Ad Fortunatum* of St. Cyprian', *Journal of Theological Studies* 29 (1928), pp. 113-36. Cf. Allen Brent, *Cyprian and Roman Carthage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[91] *Durat fortis et stabilis religiosis meditationibus fundata mens*, Cyprian, *De exhortatione* 13.

over the ancient and sacred footsteps of the righteous, let us go through the same proofs of sufferings'.[92] Cyprian significantly closes his survey of the Maccabean martyr story with the uncompromising person of Eleazar, evidently a martyr who disapproved of any show of pretence while being interrogated and tortured.

So far, all evidence handpicked from the Early Church era points in the direction of an established notion of salvific participation among Jews and Christians. For Christians, being a disciple of Jesus means that they participate in the merits of the cross, and suffer in order to direct salvation into salutary directions ahead. Yet there are many more examples to look at in early Christian literature to verify the provisional thesis that Christians add by their suffering to the spiritual chastity and integrity of the church.[93] Such premises do not disqualify or nullify the crucifixion of Jesus. They do not render the work of Christ insufficient—not at all. According to prominent early Christian voices disciples of Jesus are fully engaged, from head to toe, in the mission to drink the cup that Jesus drank.

Baptists and saints

If we ask what Baptists think of the idea of salvation participation, the average answer would be that no one is able to do what Christ did, and that God never asked of Christians to complement or supplement the salvation work that he accomplished. After all, the Book of Hebrews declares that Jesus 'entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood'.[94] On the other hand, the issue of discipleship is looked upon as paying a high price, because carrying one's cross does imply total surrender to God and full dedication to his Kingdom. However, the work of Christ and the work of the church seem to consist of two separate hemispheres, orbiting close to each other, but without approaching each other, like two ships passing in the night. Still, the question remains: does participation in the work of Christ precludes any form of influence or impact on the progress and transformation of the fruit of the work of Christ, which is salvation and renewal?

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[92] Cyprian, *De exhortatione* 11.

[93] Cf. Henk Bakker, 'Helpers en bondgenoten voor de vrede'. Een peiling van vroege christelijke zelfinterpretatie', *Radix* 35/3 (2009), pp. 190-205, --, Animosity and (Voluntary) Martyrdom: The Power of the Powerless', in: John T Fitzgerald, Fika J van Rensburg, Herrie F van Rooy (eds.), *Animosity, the Bible and Us: Some European, North American and South African Perspectives*, Society of Biblical Literature, Global Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship 12 (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), pp. 287-297, --, 'Potamiaena: Some Observations About Martyrdom and Gender in Ancient Alexandria', in: A Hilhorst, G H van Kooten (eds.), *The Wisdom of Egypt: Jewish, Early Christian and Gnostic Essays in Honour of Gerard P. Luttikhuizen*, Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 59 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 331-350, --, '"Beyond the Measure of Man": About the Mystery of Socratic Martyrdom', forthcoming in *Church History and Religious Culture*.

[94] Heb 9:12.

Thick discipleship

The almost forgotten flipside of discipleship among Baptists is that sharing in Christ's sufferings, drinking the cup that Christ drank, is a form of thick discipleship that elevates the story of affliction to a level where it surpasses personal identity. It goes beyond personal identity to merge with the archetypal figure of the servant suffering for the people, as in the lives of Paul and Peter and others; most notably in the life and death of Jesus the Messiah. The worldwide church nowadays broadly recognizes the idea of a collective identity embodied by the sufferer on whose shoulders victory over the adversary rests.[95] The story of the Christian martyr does not belong to them alone, because dying for the sake of the Christian faith cannot be owned. It is part of a larger narrative in which the original encounter between the forces of evil and the light of God is re-enacted once again.

If martyrdom can be defined as a re-enactment of the death and victory of Jesus, the sacrifice may be considered as a powerful practise. However, it is not something that the church can act out by choice and preparation, as it does with the Eucharist and baptismal services, but in the sense that by martyrdom the death of Jesus is being copied in more detail than any sacrament could ever do, so as to transform the martyr into a powerful symbol of obedience, victory, and life. Hence, we cannot but endorse the image of the martyr as being close to Christ and as bridging, by his life example, the abyss of denial of faith.

Sacramental leadership

Almost thirty years ago the Baptist theologian James Wm McClendon rightly stated that Christian communities need heroes of faith to embody the convictions they share. [96] We honour our fathers and mothers of faith because their lives aptly symbolise our shared convictions and the great story of the faith as we understand it. Of course, a hero of faith is not free from sins. Yet, for Baptists the word 'saint' perfectly fits into their vision of the church, which is a community of saints determined to follow Jesus Christ

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[95] See for example: B J Grim and R Finke, *The Price of Freedom Denied. Religious Persecution and Conflict in the Twenty-First Century* (2011); C L Tieszen, *Minding the Gaps: Overcoming Misconceptions of Persecution* (2009); --, *Re-Examining Religious Persecution. Constructing a Theological Framework for Understanding Persecution* (2008); A Fernando, *An Authentic Servant* (2008); --, *The Call to Joy and Pain: Embracing Suffering in Your Ministry* (2007); --, *Jesus Driven Ministry* (2002). See also: C Sauer, *Researching Persecution and Martyrdom, Part 1: The External Perspective* (2008); D van Knippenberg and B van Knippenberg, *Leader Self-Sacrifice and Leadership Effectiveness: The Moderating Role of Leader Prototypicality* (2005); M T B Laing (ed.) *Persecution and Suffering* (2002); J Ton, *Suffering, Martyrdom, and the Rewards in Heaven* (1997).

[96] James Wm McClendon, 'Do We Need Saints Today? [1986]', in R A Newson and A C Wright (eds.), *The Collected Works of James Wm. McClendon, Jr., Vol. 2* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2014), pp. 285-294.

wherever he goes. A saint belongs to Jesus and is faithful to his master, and Baptist history shows that many of these visible saints eventually died a martyr's death because they did not yield to the powers that be. So, the epithet 'saint' is a rare word for Baptists; still, it is appropriate terminology within the broad perspective of Baptist theology.[97]

Paul Fiddes, Brian Haymes, and Richard Kidd have recently shown that for Baptists, too, saints belong to the legacy of the church.[98] Saints live in proximity to God, and as they lived on earth, so they continue to live in heaven. While on earth they did not show nonstop moral perfection, because they were fallible, just like any mortal. Moreover, in their feebleness saints embody the faith, hope, and love of the church, and as such their lives provide the rich and costly ground of divine disclosure. Their stories make a venue for the Spirit to act through, just as the biographies of Hudson Taylor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Corrie ten Boom are still being used by God as 'showcases' for his glory. Believers receive comfort, instruction, and hope from these biographical sources. While in heaven, the saints are committed to perpetual prayer and praise with all the heavenly creatures, just as the Son and the Spirit pray for the faithful on earth, that they may hold on and persevere.[99]

Saintly Christians have no hierarchical priority whatsoever, but they seem to have been given to the church for at least two important reasons. In the first place their lives, sufferings, and possible martyrdom, as a re-enactment of Christ's agony, are re-defined and taken up by the sufferings of Christ, and by consequence they feed and tighten the covenanted bonds of the Christian community. Secondly, their lucid examples themselves re-define and transform the role of leadership in the church. Their type of leadership (if one could call it leadership) differs significantly from the kind of leaders churches tend to attract nowadays. I would call it sacramental leadership, which is not built on technical qualities like exegesis and management. Sacramental leadership cannot be taught or purchased by training, because it is the story of a life that is visited by Christ's sufferings and decisions, and functions as a storied space for people to step into and meet Christ, not the saint. Baptists should look for and pray for such leaders, I think.

For example, a leader of sacramental dimensions may have been Athol Gill, an Australian Baptist minister who died in 1992, and who at his funeral was described as a teacher of the church: as a community-builder and an

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[97] See Henk Bakker, 'Tangible Church. Challenging the Apparitions of Docetism (III): The Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come', in *Baptistic Theologies* 5/2 (2013), pp. 36-58.

[98] Paul Fiddes, Brian Haymes, Richard Kidd, *Baptists and the Communion of Saints: A Theology of Covenanted Disciples* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2014).

[99] Cf. Rom 8:26-27, 34; Heb 7:25; Rev 5:8; 8:3-4.

advocate of justice, as a peacemaker, and a Christian gadfly.[100] Stuart Blythe ends the short estimation of Gill's life by saying:

> In this respect, examples such as Gill do not simply indicate what we 'ought' to be but what we 'can' be as we too are transformed by this gospel and seek its faithful application in our context (…) For we, like them, also participate in the greater life of Jesus Christ. For this reason, as we reflect upon what it means to live faithfully in our own challenging times, we should give thanks to God and seek to learn from such saints and witnesses as Athol Gill.[101]

Yes we can, and yet we cannot steer our lives to becoming saintly followers of Jesus to whom the cup that he drank may be served. However, if Christ is our representative, and we as believers participate in Christ, God's 'yes' to us is 'Amen'.[102]

If the sun would die right now, the earth would still have eight minutes of light and warmth to live by. This far, and yet this close is the sun to the earth. In the same way, there are lives of Christians that still provide light and warmth, although they have already passed away. Their strength and sobriety have reached us ever since.

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[100] Stuart Blythe, 'A Word From … : The Value of Saints and Witnesses', *Review and Expositor* 112/3 (2015) pp. 362–365, at p. 362.

[101] Blythe, 'A Word From', 365. See also Stuart Blythe, 'Athol Gill (1937–1992) Incarnational Disciple,' *Baptistic Theologies* 6/1 (2014), pp. 98–118.

[102] 'For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory' (2 Cor 1:19-20). See Hans Burger, *Being in Christ: A Biblical and Systematic Investigation in a Reformed Perspective* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2009), p. 27.

Discipleship in Early Anabaptist Tradition:
Inspiration for Today

Toivo Pilli

This article explores some ideas and practices of discipleship in the early Anabaptist tradition which functions as a source of inspiration for the present. What will we see when, as believers within baptistic communities we mirror our present convictions against the historic faith and practice of the radical believers of the sixteenth century? The article focuses on three aspects of discipleship: Christ-centeredness and yielding to the Lordship of Christ, the communal dimension of obedience, and suffering as an expression of identifying with Christ.

The argument pursued in the following pages suggests that the Anabaptist discipleship experience in the sixteenth century has the potential not only to inspire, but also to enrich and deepen—perhaps even to correct—aspects of the understanding of discipleship in today's evangelical churches. In addition, the Anabaptist notion of 'following Christ' or *Nachfolge Christi*, touched areas of Christian spirituality which in the twenty-first century are seldom linked with discipleship, such as baptism and the Lord's Supper, as well as embracing persecution. Talking about the Christian life, the Post-Enlightenment evangelical traditions tend to use a language that is more rational and dogmatically loaded. In addition, an ethicist, Glen Stassen, describes extreme individualism as a modern spiritual problem: 'If I believe I am entirely self-sufficient, that I am disconnected from others … then I am much less likely to be open to experiencing God's presence in my life'.[1]

The Radical Reformation believers, instead of trying to create a systematic theology, 'tended to be pragmatic over intellectual, focusing on obeying Scripture rather than analyzing and categorizing its doctrines'. It is obvious that their 'main confessions concentrated on ecclesiological and ethical issues, not on theological matters'.[2] This inevitably meant that both individual and communal expressions of discipleship were orientated towards practical spirituality instead of theological analysis, though the movement produced its own theologians. However, it is evident that these believers were convinced that the call for discipleship in the New Testament should be understood in a simple, straightforward, and pre-critical way. This approach, though with variations, is shared by many dissenters who have been directly or indirectly influenced by the Anabaptists. James Wm

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[1] Glen H Stassen, *A Thicker Jesus: Incarnational Discipleship in a Secular Age* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), p. 101.

[2] Stuart Murray, *Biblical Interpretation in the Anabaptist Tradition* (Kitchener, Ont.: Pandora Press, 2000), p. 21.

McClendon has captured this approach in his famous key-phrase—'this is that'—which underlines a kind of dynamic biblicism which he believed constitutes a 'baptist vision': 'The church now *is* the primitive church; *we* are Jesus' followers; the commands are addressed directly to *us'*.[3]

One could argue that pre-modern understanding of discipleship and a modern view of discipleship are located in different coordination points on the map of the Christian life. Early Anabaptist discipleship belongs rather to primary theology: it is less rationalised, more embedded in everyday practices of Christian faith, and lacking layers of scholarly argumentation. Modern approaches are often characterised by attempts that are more typical of secondary theology: striving to intellectually grasp the meaning and importance of discipleship, and in some cases following a system of set beliefs or principles rather than living the words of Jesus Christ. The second approach to discipleship may sometimes take the form of learning a list of propositional statements, 'core truths' of Christianity, Bible verses and catechetical 'mini-lessons'. Examples of this latter approach can easily be found from materials used in discipleship courses of present day evangelical churches.[4] The language here is more of a 'learning by reading and reflecting' than that of a 'practice and apprenticeship'. The Anabaptist notion of discipleship focused on the person of Christ, on obedience, and was seeking in practical ways to yield 'to God's will in all things as Jesus did'.[5] It was experiential. And it was costly—in the sense that it was often tested in hostile environments.

This is not to say that a rational-scholarly element was missing in the sixteenth-century radical discipleship—the theological writings of Anabaptists, which were meeting both apologetic and identity-shaping tasks, prove the ability of Anabaptists to biblically and logically argue their case. One may even say that, paradoxically, these documents of secondary theology are the major windows that allow a researcher today to explore the lived-out convictions of these believers. While making an effort to describe and interpret the primary theological beliefs of early Anabaptists, scholars today rely mostly on the sources that bear the character of theological discourse which in one way or another have as a goal the presentation of the radical believers' views in a systematic way. The lived-out experience, the dynamics of grassroots level *Nachfolge*, is mediated to us by predominantly written sources of apologetic, didactic, or pastoral character.

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[3] James Wm McClendon, *Systematic Theology: Ethics* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1986), pp. 32-33.

[4] For example, see *Growing in Christ: A Thirteen-Week Course for New and Growing Christians* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 2007); Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2007).

[5] Arnold Snyder, *Following in the Footsteps of Christ: The Anabaptist Tradition* (London: Datron, Longman and Todd, 2004), p. 138.

There were, no doubt, a number of areas of discipleship—both personal and communal—in the early Anabaptist life. The three areas that will be touched upon in the following pages have not been chosen arbitrarily. The central role of Christ in discipleship, communal aspects of the Christian life, and awareness of suffering as part of a believer's journey, all pose a challenge for present-day evangelicals; these are topics that require continuous interpretation and re-interpretation in the course of Christian belief and practice. This is where the early Anabaptists can be helpful conversation partners.

Discipleship centred in Christ

The sixteenth-century Anabaptists shared a conviction that 'a truly Christian life must begin in a recognition of the truth about human existence and the path back to God'.[6] This process included humble repentance and submitting oneself to God's sovereignty. Hans Denck wrote that a person has to come to God in repentance, not relying on 'his works or his faith'. The means to approach God in repentance is Christ, 'whom none may truly know unless he follows after him with his life'.[7] Hans Schlaffer, an Austrian Anabaptist exclaimed in 1527: 'O Almighty and Merciful God! Because all of humanity lives in evil, blindness and error, and hatred fills the world, I pray to you to save all tenderhearted people from such blindness and error. Draw us to your wonderful light'.[8] The major error, as Schlaffer continues to argue in his treatise 'Instruction on Beginning a True Christian Life', was that his contemporaries, the 'so-called Christians' as the treatise said, did not 'show the slightest trace of Christian deeds'. However, the Anabaptist groups believed that a spiritual radical change, renewal of the Spirit or 'new birth', is needed to enable a person to live a life of discipleship. Indeed, everybody should know that 'in his own power it is impossible to live and do as a true believer or Christian should'.[9]

To explore a little more closely the question of *Nachfolge* that begins and centres in Christ, and requires a redemptive overcoming of human alienation from God, I will turn briefly to Balthasar Hubmaier's arguments. Certainly, Hubmaier does not encapsulate in his writings the full spectrum of Anabaptist spirituality. However, as a major proponent of early Anabaptist positions he is a good starting point for further study of this topic. As a scholar he analysed and biblically explained the tasks and goals of the

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[6] Snyder, *Following in the Footsteps of Christ*, p. 29.
[7] *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*, ed. by George Williams and Angel Mergal (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1957), p. 108.
[8] *Early Anabaptist Spirituality: Selected Writings*, trans. and ed. by Daniel Liechty (New Yor, N.Y.: Paulist Press, 1994), p. 99.
[9] Liechty, *Early Anabaptist Spirituality*, p. 100.

Christian life. As a radical believer, who was part of the dynamic early movement, his hermeneutical-theological method was linked both to biblical texts and to the radical believers' experience. Hubmaier has often been 'regarded as a prototype of the Baptist movement', though 'there can be no talk of a direct historical and doctrinal continuity' between Hubmaier and the later Baptists.[10]

For Hubmaier, as well as for the Anabaptists in general, discipleship was not an isolated phenomenon, but was closely linked with the work of salvation in Christ. Without the help and light from Christ a fallen human being was 'sickened and wounded... and completely perplexed', and unable to perceive and do good; he is 'like an injured or feverish man'.[11] Heinz-Günther Süssdorf points out that Hubmaier uses the image of healing to describe the process of salvation, and as a consequence, 'salvation leads a repentant believer into a new life of commitment to Christ'.[12] Hubmaier states: 'Through such words of comfort the sinner is enlivened again, comes to himself, becomes joyful and henceforth surrenders himself to the physician'.[13] In this way, discipleship is a consequence of salvation; it follows from 'new birth' as the Anabaptist use of language expresses it. Through this salvific healing a human being is made capable of deeds of love and service.

Discipleship is deeply rooted in the believer's relationship with Christ, characterised by commitment, obedience, and imitation of Christ. Arnold Snyder points out that for the sixteenth-century radical groups, 'saving faith must be manifested by a holy life of obedience';[14] however, it is important to remember that it is Christ who enables the believer to act according to God's will. Even if the Scripture is an important source of instruction for Christian life, it is nevertheless submitted to Christ whom the Scripture represents, 'since it is the friend of God'. 'The element of orientation towards Christ in discipleship becomes a hermeneutical key for Hubmaier.'[15]

For Hubmeier, *Nachfolge* involved both individual growth and commitment as well as communal spirituality. The personal aspect was expressed by the emphasis on the imitation of Christ. In the 'Eighteen Articles' in 1524, the pastor of Waldshut, himself still developing towards the more radical positions, wrote: 'The faith alone makes us pious before God'. The reference here is to holy character, not the legal connotations of

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[10] Torsten Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Anabaptist Theologian and Martyr* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1978), p. 46.

[11] Quoted in Heinz-Günther Süssdorf, 'The Concept of Discipleship in the Theology of Balthasar Hubmaier', (unpublished master's thesis, Baptist Theological Seminary, Rüschlikon, 1988), p. 14.

[12] Süssdorf, 'The Concept of Discipleship', p. 17.

[13] Quoted in Süssdorf, 'The Concept of Discipleship', p. 17. Hubmaier calls Christ also 'true physician', referring to the story of Good Samaritan. *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism,* trans. and ed. by Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder, (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press: 1989), p. 446.

[14] Snyder, *Following in the Footsteps of Christ*, p. 26.

[15] Süssdorf, 'The Concept of Discipleship', pp. 31-33.

Gerechtigkeit which was the general Protestant Reformation position. The central question for mainline reformers 'was whether a sinner was pardoned by God, having received mercy through faith'.[16] The central question for the early Anabaptists was whether faith was living or dead. The dead faith was unfruitful; the living faith 'produces the fruits of the Spirit and works through love'.[17] The main focus for this approach was not on *Gerechtigkeit* but on *Gelassenheit*, not on righteousness but on obedience.

Obedience to Christ was not separated from the obedience to the local church or 'brotherhood'. 'Brotherly admonition' and church discipline were inseparable from being obedient to Christ, indicating a horizontal dimension of discipleship besides the vertical relationship to Christ. However, the Anabaptists clearly rejected any physical violence in implementing corrective discipline in the believers' community.[18] 'Church is the arena of discipleship'—this is where a believer learns and experiences how to live a life of obedience to Christ's commands.[19] This understanding of discipleship had communal aspects that were expressed in mutual spiritual care as well as in practical help and support.

For Anabaptists, also, acceptance of the ban and even excommunication were expressions of communal obedience. To stick to the example of Hubmaier, a reference to his use of Matthew 18 is appropriate as an illustration:

> When one sees his brother sin, he should go to him lovingly and reprove him fraternally in secret... If he is not successful, let him take two or three witnesses with him, and reprove the offence before them on the second occasion. If the man submits, all is well; if not, let it be told to the church. The church will call him to appear before it and reprimand him a third time.[20]

In this perspective, obedience to Christ is not only a spiritual link with the Saviour, but also a visible mark of obedience to the community of brothers and sisters. As Thomas Finger explains, 'Faith is hardly individualistic, even though it is deeply personal'.[21]

In the twenty-first century when the practice of one's faith has shifted towards the private sphere of life, instead of the public and communal context, the Anabaptist conviction that the faith community has a say in Christian discipleship is an important reminder. This allows evangelical-

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[16] Euran Cameron, *The European Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 115.
[17] Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Kitchener, Ont.: Pandora Press, 1995), pp. 88-89.
[18] *Anabaptism in Outline*, ed. by Walter Klaassen (Waterloo, Ont.: Herald Press, 1981), pp. 211-12.
[19] Süssdorf, 'The Concept of Discipleship', p. 49.
[20] Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline*, p. 214.
[21] Thomas Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2004), p. 252.

baptistic traditions to evaluate their historical continuity and present integrity. Recently, this has been pointed out by Glen Stassen who argues for 'a thicker Jesus'—a practice in which incarnational discipleship is 'not merely a theoretical ideal', but 'a regular practice'.[22] Stassen argues for Christian involvement in the social and political arenas, which the early Anabaptists rejected. But this is another story. It is sufficient to underline here that for these sixteenth-century radical groups—at least for those who survived the test of time—the relationship with Christ was closely linked to supportive and obedient relationships between brothers and sisters. In the following subsections some further areas of Anabaptist discipleship will be explored: baptism and the Lord's Supper as part of obedience, and suffering as an expression and practice of discipleship. I have selected these topics because they potentially help to expand the present evangelical notion of discipleship which, as already stated, too often lapses into individualism and rational interpretation.

Communal aspects of discipleship: Baptism and the Lord's Supper

The early Anabaptists, somewhat surprisingly for their present day soul-mates, were seeking fellowship and interconnectedness in a number of spiritual practices which today are perceived predominantly as belonging to individual spirituality. For example, they certainly read the Bible for personal spiritual nourishment, but the interpretation of Scripture took place in a framework that has been described as 'communal hermeneutics' or 'congregational hermeneutics'. Although they had their own significant leaders and theologians, the Anabaptist beliefs about the church and the work of the Spirit 'logically required a communal approach to biblical interpretation'.[23] The understanding of church as a brotherhood and certain patterns of communal living are widely associated with Anabaptists. And rightly so. What is illuminating for present-day believers from evangelical circles is the fact that communal aspects in Anabaptist life helped to give meaning even to baptism and the Lord's Supper, which free church members tend to see today mainly from an individual faith perspective.

William Estep, the author of *The Anabaptist Story*, underlines that baptism was an important expression of obedience to Christ and an act of discipleship for Anabaptists. Not only did many Anabaptist leaders, such as Conrad Grebel, Balthasar Hubmaier, Hans Hut, Menno Simons, and others, write about believer's baptism, but practicing it under 'adverse circumstances' they chose the way of Christ and put their convictions into

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[22] Stassen, *A Thicker Jesus*, p. 40.
[23] Murray, *Biblical Interpretation*, p. 157.

action. 'Indeed, understanding the place of baptism in Anabaptist life may well be the key to interpreting the Anabaptist views of discipleship and the church', concludes Estep.[24]

Estep also says that baptism was 'the symbol of corporate discipleship of the visible church'.[25] I would argue that Estep was too modest in his wording. Baptism for Anabaptists was more than a symbol—it was a practical way of being obedient to the community, the brotherhood. While being 'a public confession and testimony of an inward faith' it was also an act of entering into a relationship of mutual support and admonition. A symbol is a concept or object that represents something else. There is not only similarity but also a significant distance between a symbol and what it signifies. For early Anabaptists the act of baptism not only represented the reality of being obedient to Christ and the community, but it was the 'thing' itself. This was a way of being obedient.

This obedience and commitment had two inseparable facets: they were oriented both towards Christ and towards members of the gathered community. Hubmaier said:

> Where baptism in water does not exist, there is no Church, no brother, no sister, no fraternal discipline, exclusion or restoration. [...] For there must be some outward sign of testimony by which brothers and sisters know one another, though faith be in heart alone. By receiving baptism, the candidate testifies publicly that... he has submitted himself to his brothers and sisters—that is to the church. If he transgresses, they have power to admonish, punish, exclude and restore.[26]

Faith and inner transformation in the Spirit was expected from the baptismal candidate: 'There must be wine in the cellar before one hangs out the sign or the hoop of the keg, or it is a falsehood. Thus one must believe before one hangs out the sign of faith, or it will be hypocrisy'.[27] Michael Sattler emphasised a couple of years later another aspect:

> Baptism shall be given to all those who have been taught repentance and the amendment of life and [who] believe truly that their sins are taken away through Christ, and to all those who desire to walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and be buried with him in death, so that they might rise with him; [...][28]

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[24] William R Estep, *The Anabaptist Story* (Grand Rapids, Mich., and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 201.

[25] Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, p. 210.

[26] Quoted in Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, p. 211; see also Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, p. 127.

[27] Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, p. 212.

[28] Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline*, p. 168

Reference to Romans 6:4 is obvious.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in evangelical-baptistic circles, baptism was considered increasingly as an expression of inner regeneration and a personal witness to the newly found faith in Christ. This has been the widely accepted interpretation, with some exceptions, such as attempts by British Baptists to find more sacramental dimensions of baptism. [29] However, the Anabaptist interpretation adds an important dimension—baptism functioned as a venue for practicing commitment in the brotherhood. Though the focus was on the work of Christ, and the language of 'public testimony' was used explaining this ordinance, [30] nevertheless, baptism served also as a way of submission to brothers and sisters—the church.

A similar element of relating to 'brothers and sisters' was present also at the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper was, on the one hand, 'a remembrance of the love of Christ which expressed itself in dying for his own', and on the other hand it was 'seen as a celebration of the oneness and unity of the church brought about by Christ's death'. [31] However, the sacrifice of Christ was mirrored in a practical way in the lives of the believers. Unity was not only a spiritual wish or a doctrinal theory, but a practical goal that was to be achieved and expressed by coming together, asking for forgiveness, and giving forgiveness. The Supper 'is an expression of fellowship', as Conrad Grebel wrote in a letter to Thomas Müntzer. [32] It was an ordinance that was never to be used 'without the rule of Christ in Matt 18:15-18, otherwise it is not the Lord's Supper, for without that rule every man will run after the externals'. [33] William Estep is convinced that 'the ethical dimension of the Lord's Supper', an act and sign of 'commitment to one another to walk together in love' and to extend this love to neighbours, 'may have been the most significant contribution of the Anabaptists to the theology and practice of the Lord's Supper'. [34]

The striking difference, when compared to the present day, is the Anabaptist linkage between Jesus' words of initiation—bread… given for you, blood… poured out for you—and mutual support and obedience to suffer for each other as members of Christ's body. Balthasar Hubmaier put this in the following way: The Lord's Supper is

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[29] See, for example, Stanley K Fowler, *More Than a Symbol: The British Baptist Recovery of Baptismal Sacramentalism* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2002).

[30] Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, p. 349.

[31] Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline*, p. 190.

[32] Williams and Mergal, *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*, p. 76.

[33] Ibid., p. 77.

[34] William R. Estep, 'Contrasting Views of the Lord's Supper in the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century', in *The Lord's Supper: Believers Church Perspectives*, ed. by Dale R. Stoffer (Scottdale, Pa., and Waterloo, Ont.: Herald Press, 1997), pp. 58-62.

> a public sign and testimonial of the love in which one brother
> obligates himself to another before the congregation that just as
> they now break and eat the bread with each other and share and
> drink the cup, likewise they wish now to sacrifice and shed their
> body and blood for one another; this they will do in the strength
> of our Lord Jesus Christ, […][35]

When the Schleitheim Confession emphasises that those who partake in the table of the Lord have to be 'united in the one body of Christ' it is not only a statement about agreement regarding what is the communion, but it is a statement about what this communion calls for in practical discipleship. In the context of the beginnings of the Radical Reformation this meant both mutual help and support, but more explicitly it meant willingness to be warned or admonished in the congregation, especially before the Lord's Supper, 'so that we may all in one spirit and in one love break and eat from one bread and drink from one cup'.[36] It is not surprising that some present-day Mennonites find the historical insights helpful. John Roth has pointed out that if the communion 'restores to wholeness' and 're-members us as a community bearing witness to be the living body of Christ in the world' then a more frequent celebration of communion should be recommended.[37]Also other baptistic believers would benefit from intentionally continuing the conversation with the Anabaptist tradition—in addition to reflecting on the wider Protestant or Revivalist experience.

While present day Baptists admit congregational dimensions of communion, they often limit these to certain emphases, such as 'what the congregation does is as important as what the minister does' and communion must 'take place within the context of free church worship'.[38] For the early Anabaptists, the communal dimension of the Lord's Supper was much more related to discipleship and serving of each other. Pilgram Marpeck mentioned that in the Supper 'the believers and baptized are to remind one another to be to be mindful of such love' as Jesus showed in his death. 'He commanded that we love one another as He loved us, and He goes on to point to death as the culmination of His love: no one has greater love than he who stakes his soul on behalf of his friend'.[39]

This takes the discussion to the third aspect of early radical believers which potentially can inspire and open new avenues of understanding and

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[35] Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier,* p. 354 (pp. 398-99).

[36] *The Legacy of Michael Sattler*, trans. and ed. by John H Yoder (Scottdale, Pa., and Waterloo, Ont.: Herald Press, 1973), p. 37.

[37] John D Roth, *Practices: Mennonite Worship and Witness* (Scottdale, Pa., and Waterloo, Ont.: Herald Press, 2009), p. 209.

[38] Thomas Halbrooks, 'Communion', in *A Baptist's Theology*, ed. by Wayne Stacy (Macon, Ga.: Smyth and Helwys, 1999), pp. 185-86.

[39] *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, trans. and ed. by William Klassen and Walter Klaassen (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1978), p. 148.

spiritual experience of discipleship, namely the role of suffering and persecution.

Suffering as an expression of obedience and discipleship

In much Western culture, suffering is considered as something that preferably should be avoided—physical and psychological suffering with the help of medical care and therapies, social and economic suffering by the welfare systems of the state. Taking this position over from the wider culture and applying it to the Christian life, the Christian church, including the evangelical part of the church, is increasingly forgetting about the words of Jesus that a disciple has to take up the cross and follow him (Mt 10:38), a verse—and its variations—often quoted by Anabaptists. Seldom—if at all—is an evangelical church community ready to wrestle with questions, such as, 'What does suffering and persecution mean for the present day Christian life, practice, and growth in faith?' The early Anabaptist answer to this question is somewhat disturbing and perhaps even difficult to understand for a twenty-first century evangelical. Suffering was seen by these radical believers as a natural and unavoidable part of following Jesus. Leonhard Schiemer wrote in 1527: 'It is given to you that you not only believe in Christ but also suffer for him and fight the same battle'. Schiemer supports his view by referring to Mt 10:24-25: 'That is the lot of all Christians for the disciple is no greater than the master'.[40]

Suffering and even martyrdom were not unheard of in Christian history, nor in the story of the medieval church. Ascetic and monastic movements also represented attempts to identify in certain ways with the suffering and passion of Jesus. No doubt some of these models, besides their lived experience and biblical interpretation, influenced Anabaptist spirituality. However, while the monastic life was a calling only for some Christians in the body of Christendom, the early Anabaptists made the elements of anguish and tribulation a part of their idea of following Jesus for every believer. In this sense, the number of martyrs is not the primary importance, though a significant number (about 2000-2500 persons) of Anabaptists made this supreme sacrifice in the sixteenth century. Even more important was 'the centrality of martyrs for the sense of identity' in the Anabaptist movement.[41] And identity, in its turn, was inseparably linked with ethics, discipleship, and understandings of how the biblical message of following Jesus should be implemented in everyday life.

For early Anabaptists, broadly speaking, there were two areas where obedience in suffering was expected from a disciple. Firstly, a believer had

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[40] Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline*, p. 90.
[41] James M Stayer, 'Numbers in Anabaptist Research', in *Commoners and Community: Essays in Honour of Werner O. Packull*, ed. by Arnold Snyder (Kitchener, Ont.: Pandora Press, 2002), p. 59.

to face the dilemma and tension of living in a world that is limited, corrupted by sin, and where a believer 'must await the work of God through the cross of Christ which we must carry and follow in the footsteps of Christ'.[42] This requires patience, and patience can be painful. Hans Hut adds that the process 'where the Word has been born and become flesh in us' is a process that 'can happen only through pain, poverty, and distress inside and out…'[43] Reference to Mary 'when she heard the will of God from the angel' is relevant in this image of Hut, as it also—though indirectly—alludes to the obedience and willingness for the Word to take shape and become incarnate in a believer's life. However, while this is pleasing to God, these people become 'a stumbling block to the whole world' and 'they are called enthusiasts and Beelzebub'.[44] This vision for discipleship is rather that of a struggle and a journey, instead of emphasising static confidence in faith or Jesus as a guarantee for happy living.

Another aspect of suffering as an expression of obedient discipleship was related to external pressures that Anabaptists faced in their cultural context. Suffering and persecution was seen by these believers less as a witness for Christ, and more as a way of being identified with Christ. One can even say that it was Christ that brought suffering into a believer's life. If a Christian was called to imitate Christ and live in oneness with the Lord, then suffering could not be avoided in a disciple's life. Suffering was the lot of the Master. And a disciple is not greater than the Master. Though, for example, the term 'baptism with blood' was associated with 'daily mortification of the flesh until death'[45]—this no doubt also had connotations with physical suffering, imprisonment, and martyrdom. In some cases, the early Anabaptists seem to admit a more mystical view that Christ continues to suffer in his disciples. Leonhard Schiemer states that 'Christ's suffering destroys sin but only if he suffers in man'. In some cases, reference is made to Jesus' words about loving and losing one's life, as Hans Schlaffer suggests when he quotes the biblical text: 'Whoever loves his life will lose it, and whoever hates and denies his life in this world for my sake will preserve it for eternal life'.[46]

Present-day evangelical scholarship has drawn links between suffering and missional witness. Scott Sunquist from Fuller Theological Seminary has stated that 'our identity in Jesus Christ includes our call to suffering with him'. However, he avoids mystical interpretation or a suggestion that the church should seek out suffering. 'Our call to suffering simply reveals the reality that the mission of Jesus Christ, which is now the

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[42] Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline*, p. 89.
[43] Ibid., p. 90.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, p. 350.
[46] Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline*, pp. 90-91.

mission of God carried out by the church, will be resisted'. Suffering is 'an expression of missional spirituality closely related to humility, gentleness, and obedience' and 'Christian spirituality is centred on humble witness through suffering'.[47] This logic shows the present emphases: suffering, when it happens, is an opportunity for witnessing and mission, and it shapes Christian character. The early Anabaptists, while in their argumentation and in their practice obviously agreeing with these interpretations, added a more mystical and inevitable approach to suffering. It was not a question of if 'it happens'. Rather for disciples who seek communion with Christ, suffering is not caused only by external pressures, but essentially by the presence of Christ—the suffering God—himself. Yieldedness or *Gelassenheit* to the will of God means participation in both sorrow and joy, the cross and glory. 'Yes, cross and tribulation truly adorns the children of God', said Jacob Hutter, offering words of encouragement that for modern ears, perhaps, do not sound like an encouragement at all.[48]

Conclusion

Harold Bender, in his famous lecture in 1943 describing the 'Anabaptist vision', stated: 'First and fundamental in the Anabaptist vision was the conception of the essence of Christianity as discipleship'. They sought to live a 'life patterned after the teaching and example of Christ', and they could not understand Christianity which made regeneration and love only a matter of doctrinal belief or subjective experience 'rather than one of the transformation of life'.[49] Even if the 'vision' is obviously more multifaceted than Bender depicts, he has convincingly pointed out discipleship as a central feature of the radical believers' tradition. However, this is not only a characteristic, but also a constant challenge and a goal of Christian life in the baptistic movement. In this constant task of being faithful to the model found in Christ and strengthened by the relationship with him, the early Anabaptist story can function as an inspiration and as a conversation partner.

This article has argued that the present practice of discipleship in evangelical churches would be enriched and enlivened by the Anabaptist focus on the dynamic relationship with Christ as a source of *Nachfolge*, by the emphasis on communal aspects of Christian life in the age of individualism, and—last but not least—by reinterpreting the role of suffering in the course of the Christian journey towards maturity and Christ-likeness. The last aspect has been widely avoided or forgotten by many Western

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[47] Scott W Sunquist, *Understanding Christian Mission: Participating in Suffering and Glory* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2013), pp. 212-14.
[48] Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline*, pp. 91-92.
[49] Harold S Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1944), pp. 16, 20.

evangelical churches in the context of religious freedom. Nevertheless, the need to be able to face the issue of persecution has been brought to the forefront again by recent events in the Middle East, as it has been in the awareness of those who try to look beyond the present European situation, either into the history of European totalitarian and atheistic stories, or into the realities of being a Christian in some Asian countries. The present article has also paid attention to the aspect that the perspectives of discipleship for early Anabaptists permeated into areas that in contemporary free church spirituality and theology are often more narrowly understood: for example, regeneration or 'new birth' was for these radical groups a healing process, a starting point for a practical journey of obedience, rather than a matter of a clearly defined moment of 'making a decision' or saying a 'sinner's prayer'. Anabaptist views on baptism and the Lord's Supper, likewise, potentially expand present day believers' horizons towards more communal dimensions of faith, instead of remaining in the realm of giving an individual witness or expressing individual faith.

Neal Blough, analysing Pilgram Marpeck's theology of discipleship, stated:

> Contemporary interest in spirituality and the desire to more fully integrate ethics and spiritual life open up new possibilities, and perhaps can help us to read the sixteenth-century texts with new questions.[50]

One can only agree with Blough's remark: questions emerging in our present context help us to look into the radical tradition with new insights, and—hopefully—some ideas and practices mirroring back from the historical tradition help us in turn to have a deeper connection with our identity.

Rev Dr Toivo Pilli
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[50] Neal Blough, 'The Holy Spirit and Discipleship in Pilgram Marpeck's Theology', in *Essays in Anabaptist Theology*, ed. by Wayne Pipkin (Elkhart, Ind.: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1994), p. 133.

Re-visiting the Web: Baptistic Ecclesia and Interdependency

Keith Jones

Introduction

I was delighted to be asked to contribute an article to an issue of *Baptistic Theologies* prepared to honour the Revd Docent Dr Parush R Parushev for his exemplary work as a senior member of staff at the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague[1] and latterly the International Baptist Theological Study Centre in Amsterdam on the occasion of his so-called 'retirement' from the senior academic team of IBTS. He has served European Baptists with distinction for over fifteen years. Inevitably, to have worked closely with Parush over that time I have begun to acquire some of his habits. I cannot say I am a convert to his notion of the biblical significance of beer, preferring an interest in the water of life,[2] but in this article I do succumb to the famous three by three formula which can turn random thoughts into the perfect doctoral dissertation! I use this 'Parushev method'[3] because I stand in awe of an academic who can reach the very highest distinctions for work in one discipline—mathematics and applied robotics—to become a member of the Bulgarian Academy of Science, then following conversion to the way of Christ, begin at the lowliest level of study[4] in another discipline, theology, and emerge with a doctoral degree with high distinction in this very different academic discipline.[5] We lesser mortals simply stand in awe of his knowledge and achievements as an academician of international repute in two very different areas.

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[1] The Baptist Theological Seminary was founded in Rueschlikon, Switzerland, in 1949 by the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. It developed there until the institution was handed over to the European Baptist Federation in 1989. In 1996 it removed to Prague, Czech Republic, being renamed the International Baptist Theological Seminary. In 2013 the decision was taken to move to Amsterdam and for IBTS to co-operate with the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and with other theological institutions in greater Amsterdam. At that time the European Baptist Federation renamed the institution the International Baptist Theological Study Centre, recognising the focus on research work at Masters and Doctoral level.

[2] Water of life—in Gaelic *uisge beatha*.

[3] It may be that three by three is a classic dissertation writing formula for mathematicians, but Parush developed this approach for theology, ethics, and biblical studies (he never quite won over the historians, led by the redoubtable Revd Dr Ian M Randall FRHistS !) and in our annual research colloquia weeks could frequently be heard expounding its virtues to bemused students.

[4] Parush R Parushev is an alumnus of BTS (IBTS) having attended the Summer Institute of Theological Education in Switzerland at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Empire when it became possible for Bulgarian Baptists to travel abroad to study. From there his ability was noted and he was able to pursue theological studies at Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky and later doctoral studies with James William McClendon Jr, Nancey Murphy, and Glen H Stassen at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California.

[5] Parush was formed academically in Eastern Europe under communism, but studied theology primarily in the West and this has given him some unique insights. See his 'East and West: A Theological Conversation', *Journal of European Baptist Studies,* 1:1 (September 2000), pp. 30-43.

Yet, this article was not written simply to engage in a reflection upon the fascinating mind which could turn a simple gathering in a village pub[6] into a seminar worthy of a top flight university, but to acknowledge and affirm something else. Parush R Parushev is a believer convicted in his desire to be part of a believing community which is missional in intent and supportive in character, whether that is in preaching, welcoming people to worship, or washing up after the monthly agape meals.[7]

Over fourteen years we have sought, together, to engage in the work of applied theology [8] and especially in what a gathering, intentional, convictional, missional, porous[9] community of believers might look like and feel like in our post-everything Europe.

So, this article does not so much break new ground as return to fertile soil and contrast and compare this fertile soil with experiences of inherited church[10] as seen from the Isles,[11] now, in contrast to heady days in Prague[12] when together, with other outstanding colleagues, we sought to open the minds of the next generation of European Baptist servant leaders to the possibility of what the 'True Church'[13] might look like. It is worth noting here the work of Professor Ivana Noble from the Hussite tradition, who has

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[6] Here I refer to the Jenerálka Pub opposite the former IBTS campus in Praha 6.

[7] We together helped found and sustain a church plant, the Šárka Valley Community Church , or SVCC (Baptist), a member church of the Czech Baptist Union, with an eclectic congregation of high-flying diplomats, seminary staff, local people, and students, almost all *en passant*. A minimalist church in terms of structure, but a maximalist church in terms of care, concern, laughter, and love. A delightful church to be part of.

[8] I draw your attention to Parush R Parushev, 'Gathered, Gathering, Porous: Reflections on the Nature of Baptistic Community', *Baptistic Theologies,* 5:1 (Spring 2013), pp. 35-52.

[9] For earlier reflections on this theme see my 'Towards a Model of Mission for Gathering, Intentional, Convictional *Koinonia*', *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, 4:2 (January 2004), pp. 5-13.

[10] Inherited church appears to have become the accepted term amongst contemporary theologians and missiologists for settled, gathered communities of Christians who meet in a building dedicated to the worship of the Triune God with Sunday services and a range of midweek activities. This being in contrast to fresh expressions of ecclesial life which may meet at non-traditional times in rented space or home space and which may have a specific focus on age profile, activity focus, around communal meals, or in pursuit of specific agendas such as justice or peace.

[11] It is always difficult to know what to call the collection of islands and peoples off the north west coast of peninsula Europe, but I use the term, here, of Norman Davies, Emeritus Professor of History in the University of London. See further his important work *The Isles: A History* (London: Macmillan,1999) especially the Introduction on the problem of naming these islands off north west Europe.

[12] I will use the Anglo-Saxon term for the Czech capital city, Prague, though for many years we worked with the proper Czech name, Praha, declined as appropriate. The *Journal of European Baptist Studies,* founded and still published by IBTS determined originally that names of cities and regions should be rendered in the form of local usage, but this has proved hard to sustain!

[13] The search for the 'True Church' is an abiding concern of the followers of Jesus. Historians can point out countless instances where communities of faith have been torn asunder over matters indifferent as people searched for the right model of following Jesus in community. After many years of enthusiastically being part of the search I am more inclined to follow Gavin White in his book *The Mother Church Your Mother Never Told You About* (London: SCM Press, 1993) in seeing the folly of the search and generally trying to be content with respecting the motley collection of believers in Jesus I encounter on The Way towards God's Kingdom, or commonweal.

sought to develop an ecumenical fundamental theology exploring the possibilities of engaging with such a true church.[14] As she remarks:

> Traditions grow and become more nuanced […]. They impoverish and at times even kill the treasure of faith if they try to defend it by reducing rights to truth-claims to only some voices. Yet lived faith and reflection also have the power of germinating. […] what is excluded in one generation may become a tool of renewal in the next.[15]

So, to the task, three by three.

I Web Affirming

The notion of the 'web' here does not focus on internet connections, though that is a feature of modern life which is not irrelevant to my argument about the nature of baptistic[16] interdependency. Rather, it is that work of natural beauty, the intricate web of the Araneae family (the largest of the arthropods we commonly call the spider). Classic models of ecclesiology amongst the majority of Christian world communions[17] assume a pyramidal and hierarchical form. Some Baptist ecclesiologists have suggested certain formal baptistic communities operate with an inverted pyramid. Here the major determinant of life and mission of ecclesia is the church meeting, which chooses to identify with others in an Association, Union, or Convention, which in turn may identify with a continental body[18] and the Baptist World Alliance.[19] This seems a flawed analogy and is increasingly

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[14] Ivana Noble was part of the IBTS Academic Team in Prague and is a leading theologian working within the Protestant Faculty of Theology of the famous and historic Charles University. Ivana Noble *Tracking God: An Ecumenical Fundamental Theology* (Eugene, Ore: Wipf and Stock, 2010)

[15] Noble, *Tracking*, p. 240.

[16] I will use throughout the word 'baptistic' rather than Baptist as I do not want to sharply define the ecclesial communities I am writing about to one specific Christian world communion, but rather to a broader family of churches which exhibit a commonality of features as gathering, convictional, intentional, and missional groups. These notions will be expounded in the course of the article.

[17] Most Christian churches engage in seeking to be part of the 'one holy, catholic and apostolic church' by identification with a specific ecclesial family—Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Reformed, Lutheran, Pentecostal, etc. For the most part these communions have an ecclesial construct which is pyramidical. I have explored this in chapter 3 of *The European Baptist Federation: A Case Study in European Baptist Interdependency 1950-2006,* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009). For true baptistic communities, neither the inverted pyramid nor the concentric circles notions of ecclesial interdependency are appropriate descriptions.

[18] Examples of this would be the European Baptist Federation; the All Africa Baptist Fellowship, and the North American Baptist Fellowship.

[19] The Baptist World Alliance (BWA) is one of the recognised Christian World Communions and is a fellowship of 232 conventions and unions in 121 countries with 42 million members and 177,000 churches as of October 2015. www.bwanet.org [accessed 31 October 2015]. For a history of the BWA see Richard V Pierard (ed.) *Baptists Together in Christ 1905-2005: A Hundred-Year History of the Baptist World Alliance* (Falls Church, Va.: BWA, 2005. For the orthodox nature of beliefs in the BWA see Keith G Jones

unrepresentative of what actually happens to communities of believers who have some understanding of belonging beyond themselves as part of the 'one holy, catholic and apostolic church'[20] of Jesus Christ. Other scholars have interpreted wider baptistic ecclesiology in terms of concentric circles, the inner circle being a local church governed by decisions of a church meeting which freely associates with other like-minded[21] churches. They in turn belong to a national Union,[22] which in most instances[23] belongs to a continental Baptist grouping, itself then associating with the Baptist World Alliance. In most instances a local church can belong to, or identify with each further circle of ecclesiology in its own right, so the relationship does not follow the pyramidal ecclesial models of most other Christian traditions.

However, neither the inverted pyramid nor the concentric circles adequately describe baptistic ecclesiology beyond the local. Both are too sterile and lack pliability.[24] Hence, I have previously developed[25] the model of the web of the Araneae family as a way of expressing baptistic interdependency. There may be forms of associating regionally, nationally, and internationally, but they fail to describe the full extent of ecclesial interdependency. Rather, baptistic believers establish relationships, support mission, engage in campaigns, develop theological ideas within and in some cases despite the formal structures established over the centuries by Baptist leaders. Relational, informal, contextual interdependency creates more of an araneum[26] of interaction and support rather than a pyramid of institutions or

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'The Baptist World Alliance and Baptist Identity: A Reflection on the Journey to the Centenary Congress Message, 2005', *Journal of European Baptist Studies,* 8:2 (January 2008), pp. 5-17.

[20] An early foray of mine into this labyrinth of ecclesiology can be found in Keith G Jones 'Rethinking Baptist Ecclesiology', *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, 1:1 (September 2000), pp. 4-18.

[21] The issue of like-mindedness is complex and beyond the scope of this article. However, we might assume a commonality of belief in an orthodox form of Christianity as exemplified in the historic creeds with an accent on personal conversion and believer baptism, no hierarchy of leadership, no declared formal liturgy, some sense of the priesthood of all believers, a desire to engage in mission, and a commitment to human rights and religious freedom for all.

[22] National or language Baptist groupings can be called Unions, as in the Baptist Union of Scotland; Conventions, as in the Baptist Convention of South Africa; or Fellowships, as in the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in the USA. These bodies tend to be engaged in the same form of interdependent life whatever their formal title. Some have tried to argue these different terms imply specific shape to interdependent ecclesial life, but in thirty-five years of involvement in trans-local and trans-continental baptistic life, my considered opinion is that such arguments are without substance.

[23] There are exceptions, the Association of Irish Baptist Churches being one such, which does not belong to a continental Baptist organisation. However, note that a grouping of churches and individuals within the Association, the Irish Baptist Fellowship, does belong to the Fellowship of British and Irish Baptists and to the European Baptist Federation. For a history of European Baptists see Ian M Randall, *Communities of Conviction: Baptist Beginnings in Europe* (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2009). See also Keith G Jones and Ian M Randall (eds.), *Counter-Cultural Communities: Baptist Life in Twentieth-Century Europe.* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008).

[24] Keith G Jones, 'Spirituality and Structures', *Journal of European Baptist Studies,* 13:2 (January 2013), pp. 29-49.

[25] See my 'Beyond the Local' in *The European Baptist Federation,* pp. 25-60.

[26] Araneum, the neuter form of web, used here rather than the masculine or feminine form as baptistic communities, as I am arguing, should not have a patriarchy and everyone within the community has a place and a vocation.

even concentric circles of life and work. It is a pneumatic[27] relationship which has a dynamic construct.

I.i Gathering ecclesia

European Baptist life has often been recorded as being that of the gathered church. This notion has become accepted language in many parts of the Baptist world. It is, at heart, a challenge to geographical and territorial notions of church. Christianity was dramatically changed in substance and style with toleration in the Edict of Milan (CE 313) and the Edict of Thessalonica (CE 380) when the Emperor Constantine declared following Jesus Christ to be in future the established religion of the Roman Empire. Whether that was a good thing or a bad thing is a hotly contested topic in our own time.[28] Nevertheless, territorial Christianity resulted and as the Empire divided into East and West and as nation states emerged in various forms, territorialism continued to be the ecclesial construct of *cuius regio, euis religio*.[29] This notion remains deeply contested by baptistic gathering ecclesia. Territorialism may have had and, indeed, may have its place in the approaches to Christian expression in many parts of the world, but it is the exact opposite of an ecclesiology of gathering communities. Let me press the point further, for the substitution of the gathered church over against the territorial church is being challenged. 'Gathered' has the notion of a settled and finalised form and shape. This model of church is at odds with the territorial in terms of who might be incorporated. Yet the language of 'gathered' also speaks of settlement and finality. However, gathering[30] is the intransitive and transitive construct of church which araneum interdependency supports and affirms. This is not a minor argument about declension, but rather a fundamental theological issue. Settlement is a key problem for European Christianity. I recall too frequently visiting Baptist Unions in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Soviet Empire in the early 1990s. Communities of believers who had been constricted in their life by the political actions of their overlords were suddenly set free. There was

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[27] The late Lesslie Newbigin developed the notion of the pneumatic, or spirit-led church in his book, *The Household of God* (London: SCM Press, 1953). It is a starting point for reflection on a fourth large shape of Christian life outside of Catholic/Orthodox, Protestant, and Anglican shaped churches. It is explored and expanded throughout this article.

[28] My friend and colleague, Nigel G Wright has set out a case for it being a bad thing. See his *Disavowing Constantine:Mission, Church and Social Order in the Theologies of John Howard Yoder and Jürgen Moltmann* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2000) and *Free Church: Free State- the Positive Baptist Vision* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2006). The works of Alan Kreider should also be noted, including Alan Kreider (ed.) *The Origins of Christendom in the West* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 2001)

[29] This principle was accepted in 1555 by the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V and settled the point in the post-Reformation era amongst the Catholic and Protestant princes and kings of Europe.

[30] On this, see Keith G Jones, *A Believing Church* (Didcot: Baptist Union, 1998). Also published in Armenian, Lithuanian and Spanish. See also Nigel G Wright *New Baptists: New Agenda* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), pp. 76ff.

energy and dynamism experienced in this freedom. Younger people who had never had the possibility of hearing and experiencing the gospel came to faith and sought to unite with believers who had struggled on facing persecution and deprivation. Baptist Union leaders looked for ways of engaging and encompassing those flocking to learn more about Jesus. A great spurt of building ecclesial edifices took place, often funded by Baptists in Western Europe and North America.

I remember discussing this point with the then President of the All-Union Council of Christian Baptists in Russia, Peter Konovalchik. We were admiring new Baptist buildings constructed in the Russian city of Bryansk. Tall buildings with spires to rival and surpass Orthodox worship centres. I told him of my own experience as a regional Baptist leader in the north of England [31] and warned him that as communities ebbed and flowed—effactually inherent to gathering churches—what would be left could well be follies and monuments to a different, more territorial shape of church. He took the point, but the tide was against him.

Gathering churches spring up around convictions and missional imperatives not imbued with a notion of history as a place, but rather as a movement of dynamic discipleship. Such a church is Šárka Valley Community Church in Prague to which Parush and I belonged for many years. Gathering together people from very different backgrounds, people 'passing through' formed around a set of defined convictions, sitting light to most of the structure of inherited church, but seeing women and men come to faith and being baptised out of very different cultures and mother tongues. In such a community worship structures, music, and preaching styles inherited from our backgrounds are challenged and re-assessed. [32] More recently I have been engaged as something of a mentor in the development of the Threads ecclesial community in the heart of my home city, Bradford. Meeting mid-week around a Eucharistic table[33] celebrating with a full meal, New Testament style, rather than the beginning and end as in inherited church. Threads has a vision focused on mission, and with a commitment to justice it has drawn in people from several inherited churches and largely outside the traditional structures of denominational life, but pneumatic in shape and expression and having an araneum of connections.

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[31] I was General Secretary of the Yorkshire Baptist Association (incorporated) from 1980-1990 and oversaw the closing of many church buildings which were no longer fit for purpose as communities had moved on or the shape of their life and mission had changed to render buildings sacrificially erected and paid for in the 1800s useless for the missional life of the church in the twenty-first century.

[32] Keith G Jones, 'Gathering Worship: Some Tentative Proposals for Reshaping Worship in our European Baptistic Churches Today', *Journal of European Baptist Studies,* 13:1 (September 2012) pp. 5-26. See also Keith G Jones and Parush R Parushev (eds.) *Currents in Baptistic Theology of Worship Today* (Prague: IBTS, 2007).

[33] Here a New Testament Eucharist where the bread is broken, a meal is eaten together, and then the cup of blessing is shared, not the inherited church model which has removed the meal leaving only the beginning and the end.

I.ii Convictional ecclesia

The Aranaeum, or web, is powerful because of the convictions at the heart of gathering ecclesia. It was the late Jim McClendon who impressed me in the 1990s with his accent on convictions as being critical to ecclesial shape and life. An outstanding baptistic theologian, Parush had the good fortune to have Jim as a doctoral supervisor.[34]

I.iii Intentional ecclesia

Intentionality is a key notion in baptistic ecclesial construction. Our foreparents in the shape of Smyth and Helwys[35] sat in their own Bethlehem[36] courtesy of Jan Munter,[37] and having given up the comfort of home in the east of England sought to agonise about the nature of Christian believing and the shape of the 'True Church'. Today many people perhaps go to a particular inherited church on a Sunday because it is convenient, or the choice of music by the worship band suits them, or because they have a good programme for children. These are reasonable intentions not to be derided, but we need to face the disconcerting fact that the inherited church in most parts of Europe is facing a crisis of confidence with declining attendance and demoralised leadership.[38]

II Web strengthening

If, as I am arguing, baptistic gathering and intentional ecclesia represent a form of church life with a basic life structure to be free from classical constraints of territorial church and gathered church, then the danger is of independency. At root form independency is set totally against the teaching of Jesus and the realities of the emerging New Testament

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[34] For an appreciation of Jim McClendon's theology by Parush R Parushev see 'Some Reflections on McClendon's Theological Project' in *Journal of European Baptist Studies,* 14:2 (January 2014), pp. 5-12.

[35] I am a General Baptist of the New Connexion by inheritance so am inclined to look to my ecclesial roots in the search for the true church to that gathering of English Seperatists in Amsterdam. On those early beginnings see Stephen Wright, *The English Baptist, 1603-1649* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2006).

[36] 'House of Bread'—the Jan Munter bakehouse itself raises many images of the nature of the True Church. It is interesting that Jan Hus was much engaged with the Bethlehem institution in Prague, now rebuilt as the Aula of the Czech Technical University.

[37] On the early relationship between the proto-Baptists and the Amsterdam Mennonites see Henk Bakker 'Baptists in Amsterdam', *Baptist Quarterly,* 43 (October 2009), pp. 229-234.

[38] So, recently, Canon Giles Fraser of the classical territorial Church of England wrote in the *Guardian* newspaper (*Guardian,* 16 October 2015) about the crisis of excess buildings and embattled clergy within his own ecclesial tradition. He called for a new wave of iconoclasm, to destroy the church buildings in order to free the church for mission, much in the way Dr Richard Beeching took a scythe to British Railways in the 1960s to pave the way for a 'new' railway system in the United Kingdom that shows ever increasing passenger numbers.

church. Diverse and differently structured communities of faith came into being across the Middle East and, as the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles demonstrate, such communities had an araneum (web-like) interdependency, formed around the common DNA that they all profoundly and resolutely believed that Jesus the Crucified Messiah is now the Risen and Exalted Lord of History.[39]

II.i Covenanted ecclesia

The notion of covenant is, I believe, central to the gathering church ecclesia, not only in the internal relationship between those called out to participate in a particular community, but also the araneum of relationships beyond specific individual communities that create the wider integrated community of communities able to support and affirm one another and to take adventurous decisions in missional life. Such communities can engage with individuals, governments, and society in ways that might well be beyond a single gathering community. [40] In recent years this notion of covenanted ecclesia has been articulated afresh in Europe for us by Paul Fiddes,[41] Brian Haymes, Ruth Gouldbourne, Anthony Cross, and others. Paul Fiddes sets this covenanting theology in 'the uniting covenant with the Trinity' which 'may themselves be envisaged as a kind of covenantal relationship'[42] in the election of Jesus Christ.

It is not necessary in this short article to revisit the powerful arguments they have made for covenant as the key building block in baptistic ecclesia, simply to remind ourselves that in the participation by individuals and churches in believers baptism the re-envisioning and incorporation into covenanted life is paramount. Yet again, I would emphasise that baptism is inevitably not an isolated act of an individual, but a communal experience rooted in our life in the Triune God.

Of course, the notion of covenant was developed in the ancient world and with the demands made upon us as individuals in community it is not always readily accepted in the post-modern generation. Change and transience is the mood of the age. Covenant has about it the intention of longevity and certainly as the Triune God is a participant, that is clearly so from His perspective. The Bible from beginning to end asserts that our God

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[39] On this theme, see James D G Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the NewTestament* (London: SCM Press,1977)

[40] The nature of the gathering, convictional community is about personal knowledge and relationships. I have long argued that true baptistic communities have an upper committed membership limit of, say, 120 adults. In moving beyond that they cease to be able to engage in the form of intimate ecclesial life being argued for here.

[41] Paul S Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2003). Brian Haymes, Ruth Gouldbourne, and Anthony R Cross, *On Being the Church: Revisioning Baptist Identity* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008).

[42] Fiddes, *Tracks,* p. 36.

is engaging with us for the long haul and not the quick fix. Now, this is not to assert that change in the life of those of us who participate in covenanted ecclesia is not an option. This has been a recognition of gathering ecclesia throughout history, but it is always focused in being a process of change without breaking the fundamental covenanted relationship with God and with the communities of believers in which we are placed. If there has been a recurrent fault with our model of church it has been the tendency to debate ideas and too soon allow that to degenerate into complaints and criticism of one another. The common saying of the late W M S West 'where there are two Baptists there are three opinions'[43] may be a sad reflection on ecclesial life and by the added reduction to forms of decision-making within the ecclesia of God which have been described as 'democratic', far too many baptistic communities have failed in their covenanted relationship.

The True Church has always upheld a strong sense of orthodoxy, 'right belief'. From our Anabaptist fore-parents onwards there has been a concern for orthopraxy, or 'right action' but if we are honest there has been a lack in so many places of orthohexy, 'right attitude' to our sisters and brothers in Christ, never mind a clear engagement with orthopyrie, the 'right spirit' in our missional life.[44]

II.ii Radically democratic ecclesia

The earliest baptistic communities[45] appeared to have practised a form of communal discernment together 'seeking the mind of Christ'. This developed in those later baptistic communities that emerged in England and in the New World.[46] If a particular ecclesia could not adequately, to their minds, discern the right approach to an issue they consulted with others in the araneum of gathering convictional ecclesia. This could be, so it seemed to some, a slow way of discerning the mind of Christ and might come to a halt if a common mind could not be achieved. However, these early baptistic communities, convinced of the theology of the priesthood of all believers, persevered with this approach until contemporary notions of democracy began to develop through revolutionary movements in North America and France, and the growth of civic responsibility and civil voting for a more universal franchise in the nineteenth century.

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[43] The Revd Dr W M S West, a former President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, late Principal of Bristol Baptist College used this comment on several occasions in my hearing in the context of the meetings of the Council of the Baptist Union of Great Britain.

[44] On Orthodoxy, Orthopraxy, Orthohexy and Orthopyrie see my entry in J H Y Briggs (ed.), *A Dictionary of European Baptist Life and Thought* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), p. 371.

[45] Here I am thinking of the Swiss Brethren and the various communities in Mikulov, Moravia and elsewhere.

[46] The 'New World' being the developing maritime states of what we now know as the United States of America.

This democratic notion—one person, one vote—was to invade baptistic ecclesia pushing to one side earlier desires to search for a common mind in Christ through worship, prayer, and reflection. The gathering in prayer to search for the way of Christ has given way to the regular church meeting with secretary, agenda, reports, and resolutions carried by simple majority of vote. Today, inherited churches often find such an approach disabling and it has been used as a sharp political tool in the global Baptist family to create controversy and splits within some conventions.[47] The guidance of Matthew 18 has been discarded in favour of rule books for the conduct of meetings drawn from the political world, or even the military.[48] It is not surprising that there is currently academic reflection and applied theological debate amongst baptistic Christians about the appropriateness of the continued persistence of this imposed way of decision making.[49]

Perhaps gathering, intentional communities of faith need to consciously move away from this 'one person, one vote' approach to discerning the mind of Christ and rediscover some of these older, more worship-focused ways of clarifying the way ahead for faithful groups of disciples.[50]

II.iii Personal but not personalised

My argument in favour of baptistic ecclesia being interconnected by a myriad of formal and informal devices marks such gatherings out from those who wish to present ecclesial theology in terms of specific relationships. Classically, this has been the relationship of a specific worshiping community to a presbyter, who owed allegiance to a bishop, who, in turn, was in relationship with a further hierarchical person or synod of persons. It is not my desire to 'unchurch' other models of being church, rather to explore the pneumatic tradition which is not bound by such clear and determined specifics, but web-like crosses boundaries that others would not cross and is, at its very best, naturally untidy and unable to be systematised in ways and forms that can be replicated and against which a juridical form of ecclesial

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[47] It is not my place to work over this sad ground. Here we are seeking to recover older, possibly more theological models of discernment. The context of this article is Europe and for those in the USA I commend Curtis W Freeman, C*ontesting Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2014).

[48] The classic form of this in the Baptist world is the use of *Robert's Rules and Orders,* http://www.robertsrules.com/ [accessed 31 October 2015]. Colonel Roberts was a US Army officer and codified an approach to the conduct of meetings. The Baptist World Alliance Annual Gathering works strictly with these rules and normally has a lawyer present to interpret any question of application.

[49] Christopher Schelin, a student of IBTSC and a former student at Duke University of Curtis W Freeman is researching notions of radical democracy in the writings of Romand Coles and its possible application to baptistic community life.

[50] Many are looking afresh and reflecting on John H Yoder, *The Fullness of Christ: Paul's Vision of Universal Ministry* (Elgin, Ill.: Brethren Press, 1987).

authority can make judgements. So, at every level we start with a person. An individual 'for whom Christ died' and who is called out (in the gathering process) to faith and trust in the message of the life and ministry of Jesus, the Crucified Messiah, who is now the Risen and Exalted Lord of all. Such persons become interconnected with others within the araneum and within baptistic communities, which, themselves, through a variety of processes of interaction and connection become an araneum of the one holy, catholic, and apostolic ecclesia of Jesus.

At the centre of Mark's Gospel Jesus goes onto the Mount of Transfiguration and his disciples want to become gathered and settled: 'Master, let us build three tabernacles'. Of course, chapters 9 and 10 of Mark's Gospel suggest a realignment of the motley band of disciples—many fall by the wayside as Jesus expounds his doctrine of 'leastness' and that haunting couplet 'the first shall be last and the last shall be first'. This portion of the gospel sets out for me some powerful insights as to who Jesus might be gathering in to this moving community of disciples. Far too many models of church have nice theories about regular sets of relationship—family tribes all neat and tidy. Yet at the heart of the gospel is something else. People from a myriad of different backgrounds hear the message. Some respond, some turn and go back to what they were doing; but those who respond are incorporated into a brand new covenanted ecclesia which is communal in life and witness and which is not caught up in models of patriarchy—all are subjects, from the children to the women; male dominance is anathematised.[51] Here is where we face a dramatic re-evaluation of ecclesial communities. I have grown up in churches and ministered in Baptist churches that held a view of the ecclesia as family communities. The believers were divided up into couples, women, young people and children. On a Sunday morning we went to 'Family Church'. The weeknight programme of activities supported events for the subdivision of the family unit. If the religious life of the Judean community in the time of Jesus was focused around the patriarch, who had rights, privileges, and possessions, the Baptist Churches of Europe in the twentieth century may be classified as ecclesia built around the notion of the nuclear family. However, Jesus condemns in Mark these manifestations of relationship which fit ill with his call to discipleship.

We are drawn into the gathering community of Jesus individually as disciples. As I will argue later, the journey of gathering is interesting and porous. I have come to the conclusion in my own ministry that family incorporation is essentially inaccurate and may well be flawed. The individual person comes into community exactly like that, and the ecclesia

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[51] For a gathering, intentional, convictional commentary of the Gospel of Mark see Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1997).

of Jesus consists of individuals covenanted into a new web of relationships. My friend and former colleague in Prague, Lina Toth, now working at the Scottish Baptist College in Paisley, helped me to see this with fresh clarity in her ground-breaking doctoral work and I remain eternally grateful to her for helping her co supervisors, Parush and myself, to throw off some of our old preconceptions.[52]

III Web Reconstructing

I would contest that the New Testament churches (and many of those which developed through to the conversion from persecuted semi-underground faith to the official religion of a powerful Empire),[53] the pre-civic ecclesia, maintained contact in a variety of ways, by messengers[54] and letters moving between them. Certain communities in Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, and elsewhere were seen as having historic significance, but otherwise it does seem that there was a relationship of equality and not supremacy. This approach was apparently forfeited at the whim of the Emperors who wished to re-create the church in the image of the civil Empire. A move they by and large achieved on the surface, but underneath I contend that an araneum of subversion operated. These can be seen classically in the Proto-reformers[55] whose ideas burst out of a particular place to be reflected on, explored, and turned into forms of ecclesial life often far beyond the original domain of the Proto-reformer.

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[52] Lina Andronovienė (now Toth), *Transforming the Struggles of the Tamars: Single Women and Baptistic communities* (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications, 2014)

[53] The Roman Empire, of course, divided into two—a Western Empire ruled from Rome and the Byzantine Empire from Byzantium/Constantinople/Istanbul. Ultimately both centres maintained ecclesial as well as civic authority. The Western Empire focused on the Holy Roman Empire through to the Reformation era. It should be noted that the Russian Orthodox Church now regards Moscow as the third or 'New' Rome.

[54] I am interested in the fact that the first General Baptist communities in Europe used this notion of the Messenger in their araneum of ecclesial connectedness. This might reasonably be thought to mirror the way the persecuted Anabaptist communities remained connected across Europe in the 1500s and early 1600s from the Swiss Brethren, through the Netherlands, in south Germany and to the countless forms of Anabaptist ecclesia in Moravia and western Slovakia.

[55] I offer as examples of Proto-reformers John Wycliffe, Peter Waldo, Jan Hus, Savanarola. Ideas in Lyon spread to Savoy. Discussions in Oxford were redacted through Paris to Prague. The araneum of relationships of academics, Religious (that is, members of a religious order), searchers after a more authentic discipleship, and so on always worked on the underside of the history of popes, princes and potentates to bring signs of what they hoped would be the True Church in the most unlikely of moments and strangest of places. Church history tends to be written by the victors of ecclesial conformity, but that ought not to blind us to the other disciples of Jesus.

III.i Porous communities

It might be supposed that such radical[56] communities could only exist by having a narrow covenanted focus and boundary. The New Testament seems to show otherwise. Yes, at heart there appears to have been a central core of people, twelve in number,[57] but a careful reading of the New Testament texts makes clear that there was always a larger group of women and men with Jesus and the inner core itself, as demonstrated especially in the Passion and Resurrection narratives, included women and men, relatives, and secret believers, such as Nicodemus. Seventy-two were sent out in mission, several thousand sat on the hillside imbibing his teaching, and many were the accounts of his life recalled in different settings throughout Palestine.[58] In other words, whilst we generally believe there was an inner group (certainly more than twelve, adding in the women who appear throughout the Gospels) and there was an outer group of detractors in the scribes, Pharisees, and some Sadducees, there was, undoubtedly, a large porous grouping who followed Jesus by and large. At some moments, as after the events on the Mount of Transfiguration when choices about the journey with Jesus became clearer, some disappeared, but generally the disciples walked with Jesus and sought to understand his teaching with varying degrees of comprehension, even those who we now regard as being at the heart of the New Testament church, such as Simon Peter.

The model offered to us, then, is of porosity. Clear and absolute boundaries of the 'in' or 'out' variety are not to the liking of the New Testament and certainly sit ill with gathering, convictional, intentional ecclesia. Indeed, Jesus himself warns us about certainty in this regard saying to us, in effect, 'if you think you are in, then you are out and if you think you are out, then there is a possibility you are in'.[59]

Might it not be that the institutionalised church, especially that part of it that places great store by membership and numbers, has missed a key element of authentic discipleship? Yes, Jesus issues a call to people one by one, named and identified, to join the journey to the commonweal[60] of God,

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[56] I use 'radical' in the true sense of those seeking to return to the roots of an idea, as in the search for the nature of the New Testament church. Today 'radical' has become a word beloved of centrist politicians for anyone not willing to conform to their notion of the supine state.

[57] As New Testament commentators constantly point out, this may be a device to link the new covenanted followers of Jesus to the old covenant twelve tribes of Israel.

[58] On this I to commend to you the fascinating book by Etienne Trocmé *Jesus and his Contemporaries,* English trans. by R A Wilson, (London: SCM Press), 1973.

[59] This is a paraphrase of Mark 10:31. This first impinged upon my understanding of discipleship listening to the New Testament introduction lectures of the late Revd W Ernest Moore MA MTh, one- time tutor at Northern Baptist College.

[60] I am conscious that the language of the Bible focuses on the notion of the Kingdom of God. Maintaining the image of good kings in the biblical sense has proved difficult in the annals of history. Several scholars now use the more inclusive and less hierarchical word 'commonweal' and I do so here, though I cannot devote time here to arguing the choice.

to identify with others in gathering, intentional (purpose driven?) ecclesial communities, but at different and differing moments such communities exemplify porosity. Levels of commitment, engagement, conviction might be adjusted by those on the Way and in this Jesus does not give up on them (or, indeed, give up on us) but, as with Simon Peter, encourages, cajoles, corrects, and embraces the wayfarer back into the araneum of faith, where there is space for those who miss their way from time to time, or find the journey hard and unrelenting.

III.ii Missional communities

Inevitably, such communities exemplify a life of openness and acceptance. They stand in juxtaposition to others built around rules and procedures. They are no doubt untidy in formulation and in danger of getting things wrong, though they take the trouble to share their faults and failings with other like-formed communities in the araneum of interdependency.

What is consistent about them is that they do not look inward, but outward. Outwardness that is engaging holistically and consistently with everything around us, is to seek to be interacting with the *Missio Dei*.[61] The very notion of gathering assumes this, but Parush has always exemplified an approach to theological reflection that inevitably leads to action beyond the ecclesia in the life of the world. With colleagues at IBTS, Prague, Parush sought to map out some of the contemporary challenges to ethics and mission for baptistic communities.[62] In this journey and desire to be missional at the very heart of our ecclesia there are dangers and minefields. It is why our constant refrain has been that theology has to be contextual and has to be tested against the history of the disciples of Jesus and constantly by reference back, especially, to the New Testament experience. As Jim McClendon put it 'this is that' and 'then is now'.[63] We have been helped in understanding potential pitfalls in constructing missional theologies for gathering communities by our colleague, Tim Noble, who has reflected at length on the possible dangers of a specific method leading communities astray from the intentions of God.[64]

What goes without question is that the inevitability of a gathering community is that convictions must be lived and shared in the surrounding

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[61] David Bosch *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books,1998) remains a classic textbook on understanding the mission of God and our own calling in mission.

[62] Rollin G Grams and Parush R Parushev (eds.), *Towards an Understanding of European Baptist Identity* (Prague: IBTS, 2006). Parush R Parushev, Ovidiu Creangă and Brian Brock, *Ethical Thinking at the Crossroads of European Reasoning* (Prague: IBTS, 2007).

[63] William J McClendon, Jr, *Systematic Theology: Ethics, Doctrine, Witness* (3 vols., Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1986, 1994, 2000).

[64] His work on liberation theology has a relevance here. Tim Noble, *Keeping the Window Open: The Theological Method of Clodovis Boff and the Problem of the Alterity of the Poor* (Prague: IBTS, 2009).

world. Politics, social experiences, the outcast, the dispossessed, and the environment are all legitimate areas of engagement for a missional community. It may be the case that not every ecclesial body can engage with every issue with full force and conviction all of the time. This is where the araneum again comes into play. I contend it is quite legitimate for a particular local ecclesia to have a focused agenda born of their context. So, for instance, SVCC and IBTS, set in the glorious surrounds of a national park, engaged in environmental theology and action as part of our missional activity.[65]

III.iii Intuitional, not institutionalised

Which brings me to my final three in the final three. Contemporary baptistic gathering ecclesia in Europe [66] face, I believe, challenges unprecedented since Christianity was declared the religion of the Empire eighteen centuries ago. Yet, with Jim McClendon and countless others, we can choose to re-engage with the life of those first persecuted communities of faith who had to work things out in an alien environment whilst holding together in an araneum of relationships. This intuitional form of following Jesus has been a recurrent theme on the underside of institutional church development.

It seems, by nature, to focus on small groups, not big assemblies, find strength in sharing meals with a purpose and memory,[67] and is determined that the convictions held are to be revealed to the world by action, not necessarily in a myriad of words. Such gathering ecclesia know their vulnerability to wider society and to error, so they will not act alone, but revise and modify their life and convictions in conversation with other 'true churches' in the araneum.

This way of being the ecclesia of God on the journey of discipleship is counter-intuitive to the inherited church, be it territorial or gathered. It may well turn out to be minimalist in terms of rules, structures, and regulations. Parush and I experienced such a church in SVCC and the Threads ecclesia in Bradford has only a prayer card and a Facebook page to identify it. However, both these modest ecclesia have contacts, correspondents, and

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[65] The therapeutic value of sweeping up leaves deserves a pastoral theological treatise of its own. On environmental theology at IBTS see John Weaver and Margot R Hodson (eds.) *The Place of Environmental Theology: A Guide for Seminaries, Colleges and Universities,* (Prague: Whitley Trust and IBTS, 2007). See also Keith G Jones, 'Baptists and Creation Care', *Baptist Quarterly,* 42 (July 2008), pp. 452-476.

[66] I have lived out my ministry in Europe and though have made frequent forays to North, Central and South America and Africa I claim no expertise in how church life is developing there and recognise several of the arguments I have expounded so far fit ill with notions of church and mission in North America.

[67] Eating meals seemed crucial to Jesus and is proposed as a command to his disciples. The recovery of the fullness of a meal, starting with the breaking of bread and concluding, when all are satisfied, with the cup of blessing is at the heart of convictional believing. See Eleanor Kreider, *Given for You: A FRESH Look at Communion* (Leicester: IVP, 1998) and Dennis E Smith and Hal E Taussig, *Many Tables: The Eucharist in the New Testament and Liturgy Today* (London: SCM Press, 1990).

insights drawn from countless sources and thereby, in my view, bear 'the marks'[68] of being part of the one holy, catholic and apostolic church of Jesus Christ gathering, intentional, convictional, porous, missional, and connected.

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[68] A common theme of ecclesiologists is to look for the so-called 'marks' of the True Church. These tend to be identified in formal and juridical ways. A classic definition belongs to the churches of the Leunberg Church Fellowship, the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE/GEKE) 'in the right teaching of the Gospel and in the right administration of the Sacraments' contained in *Agreement between the Reformation Churches in Europe, 16 of March, 1973* (Frankfurt Am Main: Otto Lembeck, 1993). The Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church, the liturgy of the autocephalous Orthodox churches, and the Anglican Quadrilateral all provide different 'marks'.

From the Love of Friends to the Love of Strangers: Reflections on Friendship and Discipleship

Lina Toth (Andronovienė)

'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.'[1]
'No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.'[2]
'Look, . . . a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!'[3]

As long as I can remember, my Lithuanian grandmother always insisted on calling a Christian congregation 'drauguomenė'—which literally could be translated as 'friendhood'. Someone recommended a more modern and much more widespread equivalent to this, 'bendruomenė'—'common-hood'—but in her daily prayers, she would continue to pray for the 'friendhood', often going over the names of each of these friends. I assumed that she simply liked the word for sentimental reasons, as it was common in her youth. However, now I wonder whether her word of choice offers an important theological reminder.

The Christian community is called to hold things in common—in a material sense and certainly in convictions. This strong biblical motif is described in Acts. The practice of friendship is a natural way of considering, interpreting, and improvising upon this motif. However, the friendship aspect in the life of the disciples of Jesus is frequently ignored, with worrying consequences.

My choice of this subject for this particular collection is not accidental. My theological reflections on friendship have been developing in the company of Parush Parushev, and I will be forever grateful both for his friendship and for many a conversation I have enjoyed with him on the theme of friendship. His passion for convictional theology meant that we were inevitably discussing the role of convictions in shaping the common life of the friends and disciples of Jesus.

But it depends, of course, on what is meant by 'friend'. The term's transformation to a verb and the ease of 'friending' or 'un-friending' someone on Facebook is a case in point.[4] It is common to snub the perceived superficiality of such contacts (and Parush Parushev, for one, certainly has never been keen to foster friendships online!). However, the continuum of

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[1] John 11:11. Here and elsewhere, all Bible quotations are taken from NRSV.
[2] John 15:13.
[3] Matthew 11:19.
[4] Alexander Lambert, *Intimacy and Friendship on Facebook* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.148. On Facebook friendships, see also Andrew M Ledbetter and Amy T Keating, 'Maintaining Facebook Friendships: Everyday Talk as a Mediator of Threats to Closeness', *Western Journal of Communication* 79, No. 2 (2015), pp.197-217.

meanings from 'friend' understood as acquaintance, to Facebook friends who in 'real life' are the nearest and dearest, may not be that different from other earlier, and equally varied, uses. Such would include the use of 'friend' to describe one who is not a 'foe' all the way to the usage of someone like Michael de Montaigne who thought it impossible to love more than one friend.[5]

The Scriptures also reflect a diverse usage of the term. We see the deep, personal friendships of Jesus with the 'beloved disciple' or with Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. We witness Jesus addressing his disciples as 'friends' after three years spent together. Furthermore, Jesus was mockingly called a friend of sinners and tax collectors. These three aspects, or modes of friendship, I suggest, are important for the Christian practice today.

Friendship in theology and practice

Christian theology has frequently displayed an ambivalent relationship to the notion of friendship. This ambivalence is especially evident in contrast to the great significance attributed to friendship in the classical world of Greece and Rome, as exemplified in Plato's and Aristotle's fascination with *philia*[6]. One may also recall Aristotle's classic description of friendship types as relationships based on their usefulness, the pleasure they bring, and finally, the virtues that they develop in those involved in the practice. For Aristotle, only the last type—a friendship based on and leading to goodness—can be truly named perfect and lasting.[7]

The practice of friendship has been frequently assigned an alleged moral inferiority in contrast to perfect love of one's neighbour exemplified by the divine *agape*. At the heart of this superiority of Christian *agape* in relation to friendship is the problematic preferential nature of friendship which necessarily involves conscious choice, intellectual, aesthetic, emotional or some other attraction, and the favouring of some people (who are friends) over others (who are not).

Kierkegaard's words capture some of the strongest tenets of this criticism:

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[5] Micel Eyquem de Montaigne, *Of Friendship*, http://www.bartleby.com/32/105.html (accessed 1 February 2007), section p. 5.

[6] Cf. Gilbert Meilaender, *Friendship: A Study in Theological Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), pp.1-2. As Meilaender notes, *philia* would be interpreted differently for Plato than for Aristotle. For the former it starts with specific friendships widening into a universal love; for the latter, the other way around, friendship starts with a broad basis of positive relationships, then narrows to some particular friends chosen. 'Plato grounds friendship in sentiment; Aristotle in choice', p. 8.

[7] Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, trans. by W D Ross (London: Oxford University Press, 1915)*,* pp.1156a9-20; pp.1156b4-12.

> Christianity has pushed earthly love and friendship from the throne, the impulsive and preferential love, the partiality, in order to set spiritual love in its place, the love to one's neighbour, a love which in earnestness and truth and inwardness is more tender than any earthly love—in the union, and more faithfully sincere than the most celebrated friendship—in concord.[8]

I recognise some of this cautiousness in my own Christian upbringing which took place against the background of the Soviet regime. My father, telling me about his own conversion experience, was adamant that his greatest desire was to find people who wanted to be the disciples of Jesus because they cared about truth. Who they were; whether he liked them; whether they were similar to him in their interests, age, education or occupation, was neither here nor there. If anything, he was, and indeed continues to be, sceptical of groupings that are too 'cosy', closed circles of 'extremely good Christian friends'—for a good reason perhaps, given his long pastoral experience which witnessed how exclusive such groups can be, how easily they fall out, and what damage they can cause to those involved.

So should Christian community strive to be a 'friendhood' at all? The temptation to focus on 'love', love for all and in all circumstances, is all too great. Paul J Wadell, however, points to another reason for the tension and the snubbing of the practice of friendship within the Christian tradition: an abstract agape is always going to have an upper hand against an abstract friendship. However, as he argues, friendships never occur in a vacuum; they occur within some tradition which endows them with goals and sets them in a particular narrative out of which they draw their meaning.[9] It is for this reason that the classical texts on friendship such as Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* can only be partially helpful for a discussion such as the one carried out here:[10] 'What friendship sets out to achieve is one thing if the friends aim to secure excellence in Athens, another thing if they aim for the Kingdom of God'.[11]

Christian history offers one group, the monastics, who seemed to perceive this significance of friendship. This is evident in the works of Thomas Aquinas, Aelred of Rievaulx, or, more recently, the delightfully profound (as well as down-to-earth) reflection on friendship by Mother Mary Francis.

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[8] Søren Kierkegaard, *The Works of Love*, trans. by David F and Lillian Marvin Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), p. 37.

[9] Paul J Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), p.72.

[10] For the purposes of this argument, Aristotle's interest in virtues certainly provides a helpful framework for discussing practices such as friendship. The *substance* of a practice such as friendship, however (i.e., its particular virtues) may not be so similar, given the difference between the narrative followed by Aristotle and that of the followers of Christ.

[11] Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life*, pp. 72-73. Wadell continues, 'Some accounts of friendship may indeed be inimical to Christian love, but that is not necessarily friendship's liability, but a weakness of the narrative according to which it is judged'. Ibid., p. 73.

This is important, as monks and nuns knew full well the dangers of 'special' or 'particular friendships'.[12] Yet Mother Mary Francis still talks about love born in friendship as the starting point of 'every kind of love there is. . . There is no real love of any kind that is not rooted in friendship; and when love does not seem to be functioning properly, when it is not fruitful, it is always because there is not friendship in love'.[13] Addressing the members of her own walk of life, she warns: 'If we do not call each other friends, then let us not pretend that we can call each other sisters. We cannot have real sisters who are not real friends. And so it goes with every human relationship'.[14]

And so it should go, I would suggest, with all Christian communities who strive towards a continuous transformation of disciples into the image and likeness of the One who first called his disciples 'friends'.

Practice of friendship: Three modes

'So far, so good', to use one of the favourite phrases of Parush Parushev. Yet how does such friendship become a reality in the lives of Christian communities? And, to address the concern previously raised over the insularity of closed friendship circles, how can these communities foster relationships that do not resemble a private club but are welcoming and inclusive?

I would argue that this requires three different expressions, or modes, of friendship to be practiced with equal seriousness: personal, communal, and missional. What follow are some reflections on each of these three.

Friendship as a Personal Practice

I have reflected elsewhere on the pressing need to revive the practice of deep, personal friendships.[15] As noted above, this practice has frequently suffered from theological 'snubbing' when contrasted with the call to sacrificial Christian love. The making of modernity has further qualified the problem of accounting for the place and the role of friendship.[16] Among the reasons for the current scarcity of friendship one could note the growing importance of the work people do for a living as the major defining factor of

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[12] An interesting overview of the theme of and the practice of friendship in monastic circles is Brian Patric McGuire's *Friendship and Community: The Monastic Experience, 350-1250* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2010). On the concern over 'particular friendships', see Ibid., pp. 18, 82; p. 400; pp. 418-421.

[13] Mother Mary Francis, *But I have Called You Friends: Reflections on the Art of Christian Friendship* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006)*, p. 12.

[14] Ibid., pp. 12-13.

[15] Lina Andronoviene, *Transforming the Struggles of Tamars: Single Women and Baptistic Communities* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf&Stock, 2014), pp. 207-215.

[16] On the diminishing quality of friendship in current times, see Digby C Anderson, *Losing Friends* (London: Social Affairs Unit, 2001).

their identity. This is further intensified by the lack of time to nurture friendships arising from the demand of the work place. There is, of course, the growing issue of mobility which often precludes the nurture that lasting friendships require. When all of this takes place in a highly individualistic, rather than relational, framework of personal identity, friendship can hardly be anything more than an 'extra', however nice and helpful.

In addition, the focus on the erotic, whether in (Christian) marriage or in a sex-for-pleasure relationship or the variations in between, has also pushed other non-family relationships to the margins. The erotically charged atmosphere in which daily life takes place has also impacted physical expressions in friendships, be they same sex or not: one must be careful in the way one shows physical affection. The fear arising from the problems shaking the institution of the family in the Western world also adds to the poverty of the practice of friendship. Friends can be perceived as detrimental to family life, taking away from the time that should be spent by the couple together.

Yet on the other hand, a renewed interest in friendship has been triggered by recent developments, particularly the disillusionment with the values of modernity and recognition of the importance of relational aspects for a wholesome life.[17] There is an increasing willingness to reflect on the role of friends; even when there is no space for friends in adult life, many parents certainly care about the friends their children have, for they know too well that 'through friendships we gain a sense of who we are and what the world is like—of the universe of the everyday….'.[18]

Perhaps because of this strong desire emerging for friendship, at times the practice is romanticised beyond recognition: the myth of a perfect friend suddenly appearing[19] is somewhat similar to the appearance of the knight on a white horse. Just as with romantic love, when the reality of the practice on the ground begins to look rather different from the icon glowing from the TV screen and billboards, disappointment takes over.

Thus it is important to consider the key virtues necessary for the growth of personal, close friendships, qualities and skills such as commitment, particularity, mutuality, and vulnerability.[20]

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[17] Ray Pahl, *On Friendship* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), p.1.

[18] David Matzko McCarthy, *The Good Life: Genuine Christianity for the Middle Class.* The Christian Practice of Everyday Life Series (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2004), p. 35.

[19] E.g., Pat O'Connor, *Friendships Between Women: A Critical Review* (London: Harverster Wheatsheaf, 1992), p.181.

[20] 'Virtues' are understood here as certain skills, or personal and communal qualities, which are recognised as needed for the successful participation in a practice such as that of friendship, community formation, or mission. Such an approach follows the methodology of Alasdair MacIntyre; see his seminal *After Virtue,* 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984). For a further elaboration on the contribution of MacIntyre's work for Christian ethical thinking, see Nancey Murphy, Brad J. Kallenberg, and Mark Thiessen Nation (Eds.), *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition: Christian Ethics after MacIntyre* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997).

Commitment is often understood primarily in terms of readiness to give one's time and attention to a friend in need. It grows together with the practice, when friends discover each other's trustworthiness and faithfulness—not as a cold rational calculation and testing, but as a process of ongoing growth of lives together, conscious as well as unconscious. It is likely to be more assumed than spoken about, but commitment and the steadfastness it requires at times can be very costly. Crisis situations that demand such commitment are also the points where the endurance of a friendship is tested. Sociologists researching the costs involved in sustaining friendships list 'emotional aggravation and time' as examples, also pointing out how the cost grows as the friendship develops and deepens.[21]

And here comes an interesting point. Although friends can be those whom we like and with whom we naturally, without difficulties, become friends, there is another dimension of friendship in the conscious choosing to make and keep a friend. Yet there are cases of friendships which have to start without any attraction, or in fact they even may have started with an antipathy. Nevertheless, with a conscious choice to start treating somebody as a friend, with a conscious choice to start loving somebody by *really knowing* them, a friendship can be born, the bonds of which can withstand violent storms of life.[22]

One of the results of the notion of commitment is that it necessarily limits the number of people one can be committed to, and therefore the number of possible friendships. Such particularity does not need to be rigid; friends and their friendships allow for a web of interrelationships that are not mutually exclusive. However, a practical limit exists, even if not a precise one. Drops of friendly behaviour distributed to all equally mean the absence of committed friendship. Therefore, at least for that reason, friendship is always particular. We choose friends because of the qualities of their character, or their experience, or common goals, etc. Even in a costly effort to make a friend, friendship grows as we begin to discover and appreciate the particular qualities of the person.

Here again comes the common reproach of particular love as too limited, too preferential. However, whilst some have seen the two at odds, some other thinkers (and, no doubt, many of those who have experienced the inspiration of particular friendship) would see the two as intricately related. In Mother Mary Francis' words, 'how can we have a universal love except by particularities?'[23] Particularity is the starting point; it is out of learning to love one, two, three friends that one can begin to get a grasp on how to

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[21] See O'Connor, *Friendships Between Women*, pp. 111-114.
[22] This is Mother Mary Francis' insight: 'someone you really know, you cannot dislike. The trouble is that we think that we know people, and we really don't know them at all', *But I Have Called You Friends*, p. 15.
[23] Ibid., p. 18.

befriend and love the fourth, the fifth, the sixth, who perhaps seem more difficult to love at the start. It is important that the virtue of particularity does not turn into a vice; therefore one must keep the door open for new friendships that can yet be born.[24] A small number of these will be much more intense and intimate than others—Francis calls them 'intuitive friendships'[25]—yet they all can reveal some aspect of what it really means to be a friend, and each will possess particular features, making every friendship unique.

Friendship is also inherently mutual; it 'grows best in the soil of reciprocity'.[26] Yet paradoxically, such reciprocity must remain unspoken and mostly unreflected upon. As soon as there is a question, 'What am I getting from this friendship?' it is a likely sign that the friendship is less than genuine. Or, in the words of Meilaender: 'Begin by taking reciprocity as our central concern and we will be ineluctably forced by the truth of this insight to retreat into the self, trusting no one and giving ourselves to no one'.[27]

As to the specifics of mutuality, they are likely to vary in different relationships. Although people tend to become friends with people who have similar interests and capabilities, that sort of equality is not always straightforward. Thus there can be friendships between very unlikely friends greatly differing in age, status, outlook, and purpose; as I shall argue later, this is the claim of the church as a community of the friends of Jesus. What is clear, however, is that the exchange has to be somehow mutual: friends need to be receivers and givers at the same time, even if the things given and received will be different for the two parties.[28] For some, giving may turn out to be the more challenging part of mutuality, yet for others it will be their ability to accept the gifts of friendship that will be the test of its genuineness.[29]

Mutuality leads to another virtue of a genuine friendship: vulnerability. It is a crucial virtue of a friendship, both at its start, when one risks having his or her offer of friendship or one's exposure of a need or weakness snubbed, and later as friendship develops and the amount of trust put in another person risks great sorrow if betrayed. Such risk can be too much to bear, thus various mechanisms of protection are built against the

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[24] Ibid*.,* pp. 20-21.

[25] Ibid., p. 38.

[26] Edith M Humphrey, *Ecstasy and Intimacy: When the Holy Spirit Meets the Human Spirit* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), p. 161.

[27] Meilaender, *Friendship,* p. 44.

[28] For a concrete example, consider the insistence of Hauerwas and Pinches that their book is the result of a friendship that started as a significantly uneven relationship between an older teacher and a young student; Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches, *Christians Among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), pp. xv-xvii.

[29] Cf. Mother Mary Francis, *But I Have Called You Friends,* p. 52. As she observes, ,'it takes a certain depth of spirituality even to realize that receiving *is* a kind of giving, when the admission of my own inadequacies lets me give others the opportunity to help me or to supply for me. It requires humility to receive with graciousness', Ibid., pp. 52-53.

possibility of making oneself open to the impact of the other. Perhaps the most significant of such mechanisms, for the present discussion, is an imitation of friendship fuelled by unselfishness, loving kindness, and a concern that not allow the other to reciprocate. Meilaender, commenting on Kierkegaard, states: 'We get the unpleasant feeling that [neighbourly] love is being turned into a weapon with which to protect the self against the possibility of rejection'.[30]Leaving oneself vulnerable means an initial capital of trust (hence the difficulty of those who have been deeply hurt to be open to any friendship) and an acknowledgement of our humanness with all its neediness. Denying one's own needs, or blocking all attempts to meet these needs, leads to denying our creatureliness—which, in fact, means asserting ourselves to be gods.

Vulnerability comes into play from yet a different angle in the dynamics of friendship. As personalities change over the course of time, as outlooks are adjusted and sometimes radically altered, friendship undergoes tests that are not trouble-free. What affects one's friend can affect one's own life. Such vulnerability will be expressed both in the inconvenient support of the friend as well as in the anguish of opposing him or her out of one's love for the person. What it will mean in either case will be that if one is committed to a particular friendship, that commitment will entail a certain readiness to be vulnerable in being affected by the changes the friend undergoes.[31]

Commitment, particularity, reciprocity, and vulnerability: these virtues are particularly important in personal expressions of friendship practice. Such personal friendships have a specific role in our lives; they are a sign of healthy support networks that sustain us through times that are too good for us, times that are terrible, and all the times in between.

Friendship as a communal practice

Small-scale, personal, close friendships can suggest an enlargement of this practice to include a community focused on a particular task and, in the process, they become a community of friends. Such an inclusion should be done with care, and with an understanding that it does not—should not—obliterate those most personal friendships discussed above. Deeply personal friendships can be born of choices, not out of attraction.[32] Therefore those

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[30] Maileander, *Friendship*, p.45.

[31] Someone like Jacques Derrida would push the dangerousness of friendship even further: following Blake, he would point to the intersection between the concepts of friend and enemy. 'Every time, a concept bears the phantom of the other. The enemy the friend, the friend the enemy'. *The Politics of Friendship* (London/New York: Versus), 2005, p. 72. Friendship may be truer, Derrida would say, when it comes from the enemy's attentiveness, 'singular attention and consideration in a tension full of hatred', compared to 'the figure or the simulacrum of the unfaithful friend', p. 72.

[32] Andronoviene, *Transforming the Struggles of Tamars,* pp. 208-209.

who find themselves together around the Person they follow can also learn to become and be friends. This Person becomes the beginning of the process during which 'we and others find ourselves through participation in a common activity that makes us faithful both to ourselves and the other'.[33]

Of course, the church is not the only context in which such friendships can be born. As sociologists and socio-psychologists have noted, a certain goal can bind unlikely people in friendship in context-specific relationships such as those formed at work.[34] Recalling a political theorist's Michael Walzer's description of participatory-communal polities,[35] Meilaender notes: 'They are relatively small groups; they involve close, even intimate, relations; and they involve voluntary relations'. 'In short', adds Meilaender, 'polities of this sort begin to resemble a bond like personal friendship'.[36]Behind the considerations of theorists, such as Walzer, stands the desire of 'a political community worth living for, to be a member of which involves a kind of moral transformation: from self-serving pursuit of private purposes to other-regarding service of the common good'.[37]

Meilaender finds such communities highly improbable, pointing out the impossibility of the ideal in the Greek polis and therefore their subsequent replacement by the empire-state, and the problems inherent in the secular societies in which such friendships can disrupt the systems of justice and order. Moreover, he goes on to say, 'hesitantly but firmly, that a Christian ethic ought to recognize the ideal of civic friendship as essentially pagan, an example of inordinate and idolatrous love. . . Politics and ethics must always be distinguished. The comrade is not the friend'.[38]

Compare this with Jesus' words to his disciples, 'I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father' (Jn 15:15). The twelve as a group were in no way 'natural' friends: it is difficult to think of positions and perspectives more opposite than that of a tax collector and a zealot. And yet their being gathered together presupposed a certain common purpose that required walking together, eating together, living together, and getting to know each other so well that they had to become either friends or enemies. Context-based, or purpose-oriented, friendships suggest that it is more than just a private bond, but a

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[33] Hauerwas and Pinches, *Christians Among the Virtues*, p. 49.

[34] O'Connor, *Friendships Between Women*, p. 161. O'Connor reviews studies which demonstrate the importance of such friendships that often go unrecognised until they are faced with change, such as unemployment; ibid., p. 162. This is of special interest today when work often is the defining factor of one's identity but also when boundaries between work and leisure, or work and home life, are blurred.

[35] Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defence of Pluralism and Equality* (Basic Books, 1983), *passim* and particularly pp. 318-321; cf. also his sequel, *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994).

[36] Meilaender, *Friendship*, p. 72. Meilaender's quote from Michael Walzer comes from Walzer's *Obligations: Essays on Disobedience, War, and Citizenship* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), p. 211.

[37] Meilaender, *Friendship,* p. 73.

[38] Meilaender, *Friendship*, pp. 75-78.

phenomenon dependent on its larger social context.[39] Likewise, rather than converging on the romanticised friendship arising from personal likeability, Jesus' addressing his disciples as friends seems to include the meaning associated with 'comrade', the very term Meilaender contrasts with 'friend'. Even though 'comrade' may sound uncomfortable to those of us with memory of a communist regime, I need to admit that the distinction between friend and comrade is not clear-cut. The word itself may be currently spoiled, yet the connotation of comradeship in Jesus' 'Society of Friends', as Quakers have put it, is certainly present. Thus a believing community deserves consideration of how it can be a place where, enabled by the Christian narrative and particular practices, the church can 'embody a kind of friendship not otherwise available'.[40]

Excursus 1: Convictions

At this point, it is helpful to recall Parush Parushev's insistence, following James Wm McClendon, that theology is deeply intertwined with our convictions.[41] Our convictional sets will necessarily include convictions of all sorts, both explicit and implicit. They will not be necessarily evident to all involved, including ourselves; it is often through their clash that they become apparent. 'How much do we learn about ourselves from our reactions to other people! . . But when we find out by this action and interaction with others what we are really like and what our own weaknesses are, we also learn what our strength is'.[42] Care will also need to be taken in discerning the nature of the clash, as it may be that the real conflict is not about those convictions which have presented as the reason, but about deeper insecurities, passions, and conflicting loyalties.[43]

The question is, however, to what extent can differing convictional sets be tolerated? How far can the discovery and interpretation of several

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[39] O'Connor, *Friendships Between Women*, p. 171.

[40] Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), p. 204.

[41] The key work exploring convictions is McClendon and Smith, *Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism*; James Wm. McClendon, *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology* (1974; repr., Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990); and McClendon's three-volume systematic theology: *Ethics* (1986), *Doctrine* (1994), and *Witness* (2000), all by Nashville: Abingdon Press. See also Parush R Parushev, 'Convictions and the Shape of Moral Reasoning', in Parush R Parushev, Ovidiu Creangă and Brian Brock (eds.), *Ethical Thinking at the Crossroads of European Reasoning* (Prague: International Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007), pp. 27-45, and Parush R Parushev, 'Baptistic Theological Hermeneutics' in Helen Dare and Simon Woodman (eds.), *The Plainly Revealed Word of God? Baptist Hermeneutics in Theory and Practice* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2011), pp. 172-190.

[42] Francis, *But I Have Called You Friends,* pp. 23-24.

[43] Stassen and Gushee provide an insightful outline of the factors involved in the formation and display of one's character which carry an important role in the case of a convictional clash: beside what they call 'basic convictions', these include 'way of seeing', 'way of reasoning', and 'loyalties, trusts, interests, passions'; Glen H Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p. 59 ff.

conflicting convictional sets help with bringing them into line? It is helpful to consider the practice of communal discernment, or the rule of Christ, based on Mt 18:15-20.[44] In an attempt to understand one's own convictions, there is a rather high probability that these convictions will need to be reshaped and transformed once the ground is cleared of certain claims. Resistance and pain often accompany an investigation into one's own convictions. However, if the rule of Christ, or communal discernment, is taken seriously, the outcome of such struggle may include more than a parting of ways, or unconditional repentance. It could include a compromise between the disagreeing parties, a creativity of new actions, a new approach, or an unexpected angle. Indeed, it results in a new creation *in Christ*.[45]

Excursus 2: Worship

Such a process will be especially significant for those sufficiently close to the 'core' of a particular believing community. Here I am borrowing Keith Jones' notion of a 'porous', still 'gathering' (as opposed to 'gathered') community, open for new people to join as well as the freedom for others to leave if they so wish.[46] Considering such 'porousness' leads to various practical questions such as the issue of a manageable size of such a particular community. As Jones and Parushev argue, it should be 'small enough for real *koinonia*'.[47] It presupposes 'communities of the street corners, of the side streets and apartment blocks, of the corner shop and the corner pub'.[48] Furthermore, following the biblical witness, the deepening of the friendship—the getting to know ourselves and our friends—would certainly take place 'in the breaking of the bread'—that is, the context of a meal shared by those who do it because of the One who called them friends.[49] What happens in the church, meeting in and meeting out, meal in and meal out, is exactly the work of discerning, defending, clarifying, challenging, and transforming our convictions.

This is by no means an easy or comfortable task. In the words of Wadell, 'true Christian worship is dangerous, far more a risk than a

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[44] See John Howard Yoder, 'Practicing the Rule of Christ' in Murphy et al., *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition*, p. 132 ff.

[45] For a similar argument of the church as a community of friends and of biblical interpretation which happen in its midst as a 'persuasive testimony' in which truth is sought together, see Sean Winter, 'Persuading Friends: Friendship and Testimony in Baptist Interpretative Communities', in Dare and Woodman, *The 'Plainly Revealed' Word of God*, pp. 253-270.

[46] Keith G Jones, 'On Abandoning Public Worship', in Keith G Jones and Parush R Parushev (eds.), *Currents in Baptistic Theology of Worship Today* (Prague: International Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007), pp. 18-23.

[47] Ibid., pp.10-11; cf. Aristotle's insistence that the number of one's friends should exceed the 'number with whom one can live together' (*Ethica Nicomachea* 1171a1).

[48] Keith G Jones and Parush R Parushev (eds.), 'Foreword', *Currents in Baptistic Theology of Worship Today* (Prague: International Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007), p. 11.

[49] Jones, 'On Abandoning Public Worship', pp. 15-23.

consolation, because true Christian worship initiates us into the stories and practices of a God whose ways are so maddeningly different from our own and, therefore, full of hope'.[50]

Wadell's comment, however, begs a question: how much of Christian worship is 'true'? Much of the so-called Christian worship seems to be about the reaffirmation of our present ways of life rather than any 'dangerous' initiation into a radical, continuous, and hopeful conversion. Wadell suggests that friendship and worship must be intrinsically connected, and that would seem to be the case if a convictional framework is applied. For this to be possible, one particular virtue—honesty—will be essential. Unless we are willing to *become* friends—not just be friendly to each other—unless we find ways of exploring the convictions by which we live and aligning them with the convictions we utter at worship, our private lives and our worship remain disconnected. Unless we take seriously Jesus' invitation to become unlikely friends, we will not learn to worship 'dangerously' either.

Worshipping 'dangerously' will insure a discovery, time and time again, that no two believers have identical convictions—for many reasons, and not the least because we as persons carry certain conflicting convictions in ourselves. In some sense, such tension will be almost mandatory for Jesus' community of friends to remain ecclesiologically and missionally porous, and to be faithful to the One who was also known as a friend of sinners and tax collectors.

Friendship as a Missional Practice

This leads me to the consideration of the third mode of Christ-like friendship, one that is often sorely missing from today's church life. If worship is taken seriously as described above, then it should already prepare the way for the openness that leads into friendships outside the church circle. The crucial virtue necessary for such friendship, and one that will be the key in its development and growth, is that of hospitality. Friendship cannot be imagined without hospitality; inhospitable friendship is not friendship but its caricature, and that is especially true in the case of befriending strangers. Hospitality is one of the central virtues in the Scriptures, and certainly a clear feature of the communities of Jesus as far as the New Testament is concerned, and yet something that is easily overlooked in the life of a contemporary church busy with 'doing' mission.

It is in the context of hospitality that we can speak of God befriending us in the first place. 'We are all guests of God's hospitality', observes John Navone: from the gift of this planet to our consciousness and creativity, to

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[50] Paul J Wadell, *Becoming Friends: Worship, Justice, and the Practice of Christian Friendship* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2002), p.16.

our capacity to connect and befriend—all of this has been given, and continues to be given, by God.[51] 'Christian discipleship means both sharing Jesus' hospitality in the Father and his mission of hospitality in inviting others to that life'.[52]

Again, 'so far, so good.' We like hospitality 'in principle'; we quite enjoy church potlucks or dinner parties. Except, of course, that the hospitality we find in the life and ministry of Jesus goes way beyond such parties and potlucks, and is of a radical sort, shown not (or at least not only) to esteemed guests and helpful contacts, but to the outsiders and 'damaged goods' sort of people: the crippled and the lame, tax collectors and 'sinners'.

The importance of hospitality as a metaphor for mission has led to some fruitful discussion amongst the missiologists over recent years.[53] The connection I would like to highlight here is between such radical hospitality and friendship. It is precisely such radical hospitality of friendship that guards the Christian community from becoming insular and self-serving. Jürgen Moltmann calls such friendship an 'open friendship'. He observes: 'Jesus breaks through [the] closed circle of friendship, reaching out alike to God, the disciples, and the tax-collectors and sinners'.[54] Such 'open friendship' is a corrective to the aforementioned romanticising and privatisation of the personal mode of friendship.[55]

At the same time, the practice of friendship understood missionally dismisses such strategies as 'friendship evangelism', whereby one might want to become friends with another person *so that* the latter then would become open (or feel obliged?..) to hear the gospel. Instead, it asks for genuine, non-instrumental, open-ended friendship with another.

Such friendship, if it is present, must be visible in the practice of communal Christian worship, in the provision of both a welcome and a space to be as one is. Indeed, an 'audit' of the practice of worship may be a starting point of exploring our convictions in regard to friendship and hospitality. Embarking upon such an 'audit', however, already requires the help of a critical outsider-friend, as those of us who are 'inside' may be oblivious to the many ways in which the stranger or visitor to our worship service are not welcomed or excluded.

As Kreider and Kreider note, the shape of worship should not be focussed on *attracting* strangers, but it should nevertheless present an open, welcoming door to those who, for whatever reason, end up joining the body

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[51] John Navone, 'Divine and Human Hospitality,' in *New Blackfriars* 85, No. 997 (2004), p. 329.

[52] Ibid., p. 332.

[53] See, for instance, Tobias Brandner, 'Hosts and Guests: Hospitality as an Emerging Paradigm in Mission', in *International Review of Mission* 102, No. 1 (2013), pp. 94-102.

[54] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church and the Power of the Spirit*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 1992), p. 120.

[55] Ibid., pp. 120-121.

of believers.[56] Here it is helpful to remember that many strangers entering our worship will do so because of an already existing relationship of friendship with someone who is 'in': 'Friendship is the most basic reason outsiders come into the gravitational field of Christian churches and communities'.[57] Although particular elements of a worship event may be more or less significant, what will speak most about the presence or absence of hospitality is a much less effable, yet strongly if subconsciously felt reality of a certain ethos: an atmosphere, a communal attitude expressed in language as well as in nonverbal cues.[58]

In spite of what we may be affirming in words, many Christian communities are not ready for such friendships. Friendship is resisted by an instinctual fear of the effect our hospitality will have upon our own community. Being willing to live as hospitable people means facing our fear of those who are different; our suspicion that we might be taken advantage of or manipulated; our uneasiness with the (very likely) possibility that as we make room for that which is foreign, it is going to change our current patterns and indeed our very selves. 'When friendship brings an offer of hospitality, it is an intrusion upon our safe and smooth-running world'.[59]

The possibility and the fear of such an intrusion are acutely felt at the present time, as the refugee crisis is developing and escalating. The reaction of churches in Europe to this crisis is one of the many litmus tests of this third, missional mode of friendship, and therefore the test of the convictions of these communities of faith. It has been encouraging to see the public voice of the Christian communities urging their governments for greater openness and hospitality.

I do wonder, however, how much realisation there is in this (rightfully) emotional appeal that, in order to make such hospitality workable, it will require us to be willing not just to extend help, but also to make friends. This is likely to be the next test of our convictions, once the initial excitement and zeal start to wane, and the full realisation of the otherness of the strangers starts to sink in. Yet perhaps welcoming and befriending those who are 'radically other' will also help us come to grips with what it takes to make friends with those in our own society—those who would never dream of entering a church because they have been given an impression that tax collectors and sinners are not really welcome.

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[56] Alan Kreider and Eleanor Kreider, *Worship and Mission after Christendom* (Harrisonburg, Pa.: Herald Press, 2011), p. 221.
[57] Ibid., p. 223.
[58] Ibid., p. 237.
[59] David Matzko McCarthy, *The Good Life: Genuine Christianity for the Middle Class* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2004), p.37.

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Not everybody may agree that the relationships between the members of a believing community are best termed as 'friendship', but I have taken a view that the practice of friendship is an inseparable element of the practice of Christian discipleship and that it relates to the formation and transformation of the convictional sets of believing communities. Friendship therefore can be seen as one of the central practices of the believing community set in a culture which yearns for connection but often is unable to practice healthy bonds of intimacy and love. In this, I concur with Wadell who claims that the church 'should be a befriending community that not only welcomes all who come to it but also offers them a place where the grammar of intimacy and friendship can be learned'.[60] In the process of such learning, both personal and communal transformations can take place. More than that, however, the nature of friendship to which Jesus calls his disciples is of a radically hospitable nature. It asks us to open up ourselves to others beyond our personal attractions and preferences, and even beyond our communal loyalties. It urges us towards the missional practice of friendship, both within and without the confines of the buildings in which we gather, and calls us to the risk of being called friends of the despised and disregarded.

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[60] Wadell, *Becoming Friends,* p. 53.

The *Starets*-Disciple Relationship According to Mother Maria Gysi[1]

Ivana and Tim Noble

When we were invited to contribute to this volume of *Baptistic Theologies* offered as a gift and tribute to our friend and colleague, Parush Parushev, the *starets*[2]-disciple relationship immediately came to our mind. There are several reasons for this. First, Parush has never liked theology or spirituality in abstract. It must be practically grounded and lived; otherwise it would have no credit. And the *starets*-disciple relationship presents one particular way of initiation into such grounded reality. Second, for the last five years Parush has worked with us and another friend and colleague, Kateřina Bauerová, on a team project investigating Orthodox theology and spirituality in the West.

During many common trips, talks, and conferences, along with hard work on the publications, we have learned that this area was dear to him for personal, cultural, intellectual, and religious reasons. Being Bulgarian and having studied in Russia, he kept encountering different forms of Orthodoxy that would impact his Christian life. During his doctoral studies he again worked with Orthodox sources, looking at their participation in preventing the Bulgarian Jews from being deported and killed during the war. On the other hand, he has also examined what led to totalising ideologies dressed in religious clothes. The *starets*-disciple relationship in this light presented a key that, when it worked, could open the way to deep sources of freedom, and when it did not, could become a tool of manipulation.

Our third reason is that when we looked at the types of relationships vital for Parush's own spiritual and theological formation, with people like James McClendon or Glen Stassen, we could see analogies there to the *starets*-disciple relationship, and these analogies found their expression in Parush's own engagement with various students at IBTS whom he taught, supervised, accompanied. And to these three reasons for Parush, the mathematician with a particular affinity to this number, we add an element of surprise—a gift. Having been so close for a number of years, it was difficult to present something different to what Parush has read or heard a

[2] S*tarets* is simply the Russian word for 'elder'. It is used (as is the Greek form *gerōn*) to refer to someone who has been called to the role of spiritual accompaniment. We use the form '*starets*' partly because the two people we talk about came from a Russian Orthodox tradition and partly to avoid confusion by using the word 'elder', which will have different connotations for many readers of this journal. We also use the masculine form, but both women and men can, and do, perform this role. The most usual English form is *starets*, but in quotations we follow the original, so sometimes 'staretz' will also be found.

number of times. But here it is: In this article we will look at the relationship between a *starets* and her or his disciple through the insights of Mother Maria Gysi, a twentieth-century Orthodox nun from Switzerland, who lived her religious life in England.[3]

There have been a number of important Mother Marias in twentieth-century Orthodoxy. The best-known is Mother Maria Skobtsova (1891–1945),[4] and there was also Mother Maria (1879–1961) from the underground church in Russia who lived near the Holy Trinity-Saint Sergius Lavra on the outskirts of Moscow, and who was very important for Alexander Men.[5] The woman-*starets* figure whose reflections we are going to present here is perhaps not as well known, certainly outside Britain, as she should be. In this article we first sketch her life story, then we look at how she grasped the roots of the Russian charism of *starchestvo*,[6] and in that context we explore in more detail the relationship between a *starets* and his or her disciple as she understood it. In the conclusion we ask how this relationship can be fruitfully understood by people from other Christian traditions.

Mother Maria Gysi

Mother Maria was born Lydia Gysi in Basle in 1912.[7] Her family were Methodist and from childhood she participated actively in the church. Her first contact with Russian culture, as with so many people, was with the work of Fyodor Dostoevsky, especially *The Brothers Karamazov*, which opened her eyes to another world. Having successfully completed her schooling, she decided to study to be a nurse, and when she had qualified, she moved to France. It was while studying that she first encountered a Russian Orthodox student, later priest, Fr Dimitri. When she went to France she came into contact first with Mother Maria Skobtsova[8] and through her with Fr Lev Gillet (1893–1980), a Benedictine monk who became Orthodox, though in

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[3] This choice is also in keeping with Parush's warm memories and experiences of the Anglican nuns of the Community of St John the Baptist, based at Ripley College, Cuddesdon, where he had several study stays, and whose liturgy he faithfully participated in.

[4] On Mother Maria, see Mother Maria Skobtsova, *Essential Writings*, introduction by Jim Forrest (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2003). The fullest biography remains Sergei Hackel, *One of Great Price: The Life of Mother Maria Skobtsova, Martyr of Ravensbrück* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1965).

[5] See Kateřina Bauerová, 'Sources of Openness and Freedom in the Theology of Alexander Men', in Ivana Noble, Kateřina Bauerová, Tim Noble, Parush Parushev, *The Ways of Orthodox Theology in the West* (Yonkers, N.Y.: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2015), pp. 304–9 (pp. 306–7).

[6] This is normally translated as 'elderhood', but we retain the Russian word here to link it to the use of *starets*.

[7] Biographical details are taken from the introduction by Sr Thekla, her first companion in the small Orthodox monastery she started in England, to be found in *Mother Maria: Her Life in Letters*, ed. by Sister Thekla (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1979), pp. xiii–xlviii.

[8] See *Mother Maria: Her Life in Letters*, pp. xliii–xliv, letter dated 6 January 1977, for a brief recollection.

his mind without abandoning what he brought with him from Catholicism.[9] It was in the chapel of Mother Maria Skobtsova's house on rue Lourmel that Mother Maria Gysi was received into the Orthodox Church in 1937.

She returned shortly thereafter to Basle to train as a midwife, but during the Second World War she worked for some time as a nurse with the Red Cross in Vichy France, where she had some contact with the Resistance. In 1943 she had to return to Switzerland, and in 1944 she started to study theology in Basle and then continued to do her doctorate in philosophy.[10] At this point she could easily have followed an academic career, but inspired by Mother Maria Skobtsova, she had never lost sight of her desire to enter religious life.

Her studies on Ralph Cudworth, a seventeenth-century Cambridge Platonist, on whom she did her thesis, had brought her to England, and with no Orthodox monasteries in Britain (and indeed at this time with the Orthodox monastic life only beginning to take root in France)[11], it was not clear where she could start her monastic life. She turned to the new Russian priest in London, Fr Anthony Bloom (later Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, 1914–2003).[12] In 1951 he arranged for her to enter an Anglican Benedictine monastery, St Mary's Abbey at West Malling in Kent, as an Orthodox nun. This was meant to be a short-term measure, but as with many other such short-term measures, it lasted for fourteen years, during which time she was professed as an Orthodox nun in the monastery, with the other sisters joining her for a full Orthodox liturgy.

Finally, with the generous help of the abbey, blessed by Metropolitan Anthony, and accompanied by another sister (Mother Thekla—Marina Sharf) the small Monastery of the Assumption in Filgrave, Bucks was founded in 1965. A year after the death of the Moscow Patriarch Aleksei in 1970, with no links at all to the church in Russia, the nuns changed their canonical allegiance to the Ecumenical Patriarchate. In 1973 Mother Maria was diagnosed with cancer. A year later the nuns (they had been joined by Sister Katherine, who had been Mother Maria's Anglican novice mistress and had finally decided to become Orthodox) were forced to move the monastery, this time to a farmhouse on the North Yorkshire moors, where Mother Maria lived till her death in 1977. The other two nuns who remained in the monastery, Sister Thekla and Mother Katherine, wished to preserve

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[9] On Fr Lev Gillet, see Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, 'In Memoriam: A Monk of the Eastern Church', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 24.3 (1980), pp. 202–08, and in much more detail, Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *Lev Gillet: A Monk of the Eastern Church*, trans. by Lev Gillet (Oxford: Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius, 1999).

[10] Later published (in English) as Lydia Gysi, *Platonism and Cartesianism in the Philosophy of Ralph Cudworth* (Bern: Herbert Lang, 1962).

[11] The Monastery of Notre-Dame de Toute-Protection in Bussy was canonically recognised in 1946 and is described on the website of the monastery as 'the oldest Orthodox monastery in France'; see <http://monastere.bussy.pagesperso-orange.fr> [accessed 9 September 2015].

[12] See on Metropolitan Anthony, Gillian Crow, *This Holy Man: Impressions of Metropolitan Anthony* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005).

her heritage, and to do so, decided to expand the work of publishing that had begun in Filgrave. Sister Thekla edited two main collections of work by Mother Maria on which we will draw in this article, *Mother Maria. Her Life in Letters* (1979), and some of Mother Maria's short texts, published under the title *The Fool and Other Writings* (1980).[13]

The Russian tradition of *starchestvo*

We turn now to an early essay by Mother Maria Gysi entitled, 'The Russian Startzi'.[14] It was written in late 1945, before she became a nun, when she was seeking for the way to live her Christian life. In this work, she sees the beginnings of the Slavic charism and style of *starchestvo* with Nil Sorsky (1433–1508) in fifteenth century Russia.[15] She points out that in the early Christian period in Russia, the ascetics lived in solitude, hidden from people, and they were seldom sought out. Yet, even from afar, they were revered as holy men, and their prayer and their way of life presented to the church in Russia a possibility of radical Christian living.

After some time in a monastery in Russia, Nil went to study the ascetic-mystical writings on Mount Athos in order to find spiritual direction there. On his return, Mother Maria Gysi narrates, he first tried to carry out a reform of monastic life, recommending that the monasteries should return all their property to the state, and after this was rejected, he founded a skete[16] near the river Sora (hence the epithet Sorsky) where he lived with a couple of disciples in the pattern of Egyptian desert ascetic tradition.

Nil's own *startsi* were mainly the writings of the Desert and Hesychast[17] Fathers, while for his disciples, *starchestvo* was embodied in an

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[13] While the letters were published by DLT, *The Fool and Other Writings* was published by the monastery press: Mother Maria (Gysi), *The Fool and Other Writings* (Normanby: The Greek Orthodox Monastery of the Assumption, 1980). Sister Katherine died in 1986; Mother Thekla continued to live and serve as the only professed nun until 1994, when she was joined by an American nun, Sister Hilda. After a conflict between the two, Mother Thekla was forced to leave, and for her final years found a refuge in the infirmary of the Anglican nuns at the Abbey of St Hilda in Whitby. While still at Normanby, Mother Thekla became an inspiration and a spiritual guide to the great British composer and convert to Orthodoxy, John Tavener. She died in 2011. For more on Mother Thekla's equally fascinating story, see Andrew Louth, *Modern Orthodox Thinkers: From the* Philokalia *to the Present* (London: SPCK, 2015), pp. 281–98.

[14] Mother Maria, 'The Russian Startzi', in *The Fool and Other Writings*, pp. 11–36. The work was written in German, probably around 1945, when Mother Maria was beginning her theology studies, and seems to be a paper written for her classes.

[15] Ibid., pp. 20–21. For more on Nil Sorsky, see Tim Noble, 'Hesychasm in Retreat', in Ivana Noble, Kateřina Bauer, Tim Noble, Parush Parushev, *Wrestling with the Mind of the Fathers* (Yonkers, N.Y.: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, forthcoming), and the bibliography there. A selection of Nil's writings, including his two extant works *Predanie* (The Tradition) and *Ustav* (The Rule) are found in *Nil Sorsky: The Complete Writings*, trans. and ed. by George Maloney SJ (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2003). Both these works are reflections on the nature of monastic life.

[16] This refers to a small gathering of cells around a church, with worship in common, but otherwise with the monks living more or less as hermits.

[17] Hesychasm is a form of prayer that developed in the early centuries and came to fruition on Mount Athos in the fourteenth century. John Meyendorff, who, more than anyone else, recovered the Palamite hesychast

actual living person, Nil himself, who, after a period when he found himself unworthy of teaching others, 'received the command in prayer to receive all because *all* should find salvation and instruction'.[18] Thus, Mother Maria Gysi, sums up, we have access to the first call to *starchestvo*, which was followed by others who in obedience opened their cells to the service of all who came.

After a period of decline, from the mid-sixteenth to the late eighteenth centuries, when the ascetics moved into the far Siberian forests, a revival came about through the work and writings of Fr Paisius Velichkovsky (1722–1794), the translator (or compiler) of the Slavonic version of the writings of the Hesychast Fathers, the *Philokalia*[19] (the Slavonic version is the *Dobrotolyubie*). Through his influence the *starets* tradition spread widely in nineteenth-century Russia. We can see also from the spiritual classic published in Russia in the late nineteenth century, *The Way of a Pilgrim*,[20] how this tradition was interwoven with use of the *Dobrotolyubie* and the widespread practice of the Jesus Prayer.[21] Mother Maria Gysi lists among the prime examples of holders of the charism of *starchestvo* Fathers Leonid, Makarii and Amvrosii of the Monastery of Optina, and St Seraphim of Sarov.[22]

While she gives accounts of their desire for isolation and for acquiring a heavenly angelic mode of existence, of their way of reading the Gospels and the Fathers and of their teaching and ascetic practices, she also notes that they were through all these endeavours, 'led back to serve within the world',

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tradition for the Western world in the twentieth century, notes four fundamental meanings of the term 'hesychasm'. These are a form of Christian monastic life, normally eremitical and using forms of 'pure prayer'; particular methods of praying developed in the fourteenth century; the theological system of Gregory Palamas; and lastly what he calls 'political hesychasm', an ideological system originating in Byzantium which spread to the southern Slavs and to the Russians. We are using it here in the first and second senses. See John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Hesychasm: Historical, Theological, and Social Problems.* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1974), pp. iii–iv.

[18] Mother Maria, 'The Russian Startzi', p. 20.

[19] The *Philokalia* was put together in the late eighteenth century by St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St Makarios of Corinth, as a compendium of writings on hesychasm, its theology and practice. See Kallistos Ware, 'St Nikodimos and the *Philokalia*', in *The* Philokalia: *A Classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality*, ed. by Brock Bingaman and Bradley Nassif (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 9–35, and on Paisius Velichkovsky, John McGuckin, 'The Life and Mission of St Paisius Velichkovsky, 1722–1794. An Early Modern Master of the Orthodox Spiritual Life', *Spiritus*, 9 (2009), pp. 157–73. There are currently four volumes of the English translation of the *Philokalia*.

[20] There are a number of English translations. See, for example, *The Way of a Pilgrim* and *The Pilgrim Continues His Way*, trans. by Helen Bacovcin (New York: Image, 1992), and for the scholarly text, *The Pilgrim's Tale*, ed. by Alexei Pentkovsky (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1999). More detailed engagement with this work can be found in Tim Noble, 'A Writ Good Guide: The Bible in *The Way of the Pilgrim* and *The Pilgrim's Progress*', *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, 12.1 (2011), pp. 20–35.

[21] The Jesus prayer is a form of constant prayer, in which the idea is to repeat a variation of the phrase 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me a sinner' without ceasing, so that it becomes as natural as breathing. By doing so, the command in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to pray ceaselessly is fulfilled, and the one praying is in constant contact with God, thus, it is claimed, helping to avoid temptation.

[22] Mother Maria, 'The Russian Startzi', pp. 22–31.

even if most often 'without their own intention'.[23] But, she concludes, 'We should not estimate someone's attitude towards the Gospel from the outward pattern of his work: solitude or service, monastery or world, practical work or intercession. For how can we know whether more is not done for the world hiddenly than openly?'[24]

The *starets*–disciple relationship

Within the context described above, Mother Maria Gysi examines the relationship between the *starets* and the disciple, saying that it can never be seen as a universal or even superior practice in spiritual life. She points out the risks when such relationships were idolised or when misplaced forms of authority prevented healthy spiritual development. Most of all she considers the instances when such relationships worked, and the blessing that flowed.

After summarising the traditional outward conditions of the *starets*–disciple relationship,[25] she investigates its inner nature. She begins by offering a simple definition of the *starets*: 'What then is a staretz? He is an older, experienced monk, well acquainted with the dangers of the spiritual life and having the charisma of spiritual direction'.[26] Then she sets out the inner dynamics of the *starets*–disciple relationship: 'On the part of the disciple absolute obedience, openness, and sincerity are demanded; and on the part of staretz, discernment, love and severity'.[27] She then says: 'For his disciple the staretz must be a clear mirror in which he can perceive his true face 'the bearer of divine measures on which the disciple can depend until he himself learns to see'.[28] The second point is of special importance, as it makes it obvious that the *starets*–disciple relationship is not permanent in the sense of reducing the person of the disciple into unchanging infantilism. Rather, it is an aid to inner freedom, a freedom that does not stem from egocentric desires, but seeks to place Christ in the centre of one's being.

This takes us to the theme of obedience. The emphasis on almost absolute obedience, on obeying the *starets* as if obeying Christ himself, and taking the authority of the *starets* as if it were the authority of God, needs to

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[23] Ibid., p. 32.
[24] Ibid., p. 32.
[25] 'The outward conditions for a staretz/disciple relationship are not uniform. The staretz may live with one or more disciples in solitude. This, for the novice, is considered the finest and easiest way to come to religious life. Or, another possibility is for the disciple to live as a cell-servant of the staretz in a monastery. Again, the disciple could live as an ordinary monk in the monastery only going to the staretz every day for confession and instruction. The relationship is then less close. A final possibility is for the Abbot himself to be the staretz. In this event the relationship is bound to be even less close because of his numerous duties and might result in the Abbot's appointing intermediaries: for instance, he may allot a young monk as "servant" to an older one, but would, of course, himself remain the highest authority'. Mother Maria, "The Russian Startzi', p. 19.
[26] Mother Maria, 'The Russian Startzi', p. 18.
[27] Ibid., p. 18.
[28] Ibid., p. 18.

follow rules similar to an iconic mediation. In the Orthodox tradition, the icon represents what it depicts and thus participates in what it depicts. However, there never is and never can be complete identification between this representation and the reality represented: to make such identification would be to fall into idolatry.[29] So it is analogously with the *starets* and Christ. Mother Maria puts it this way: 'The staretz only represents, transfers, is but an ikon, for the intervening time until the disciple himself grows strong in discernment, prayer and combat'.[30]

The temporary role of the *starets* is in helping that transformation to take place through following with the disciple the path of self-surrender and through it, a gradual discovery of a new form of life in Christ. Thus, Mother Maria speaks about the *starets* being 'a lived Gospel for the disciple, nearly the very judgment of God',[31] and emphasises that obedience to the *starets* should be shown in a manner that would resemble obedience to Christ himself. Such a strong mediating role of the *starets* is, of course, open to abuse. And the ascetic tradition is aware of the problem. Mother Maria affirms: 'It is obvious that this is only safe and on the whole possible, when the *starets* has died to himself and has buried his own will in God; and only if he has the particular charisma of discernment'.[32]

The dangers of the relationship were always apparent to her. In a letter written from hospital towards the end of her life, Mother Maria records that she had taken Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* with her to return to the first impulse that had led her on her journey to the Orthodox Church. She notes how

> on the first page I read I found the heresy of the absolute power of the *Staretz* on earth and in heaven! Not the Ecumenical Patriarch can absolve the monk from the simple command of the *Staretz*. So I shall have fun and labour in justifying my own course of non-direction.[33]

Even if the precise boundary between self-denying obedience and folly in listening to the advice of a madman may not be easy to draw on a theoretical level, it exists, and part of the skill of growing in the spiritual life is to learn to recognise it.

But rather than dwelling for too long on the common problem in all traditions where spiritual direction or spiritual mentoring takes place,

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[29] For the difference between an iconic mediation and idolatry, see Tim Noble, *The Poor in Liberation Theology: Ideological Construct of Pathway to God* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), especially pp. 73–100.
[30] Mother Maria, 'The Russian Startzi', p. 18.
[31] Ibid., p. 18.
[32] Ibid., p. 18.
[33] *Mother Maria: Her Life in Letters*, p. 68. Letter dated 2 June 1975—the recipients of the letters are not named in the book.

namely, that of the self-appointed '*starets*', that is, the person who wishes to enjoy the authority of a *starets* and require obedience without possessing the necessary gifts, Mother Maria returns to where the relationship is functional. She says:

> The staretz takes over the battle for the soul of his disciple; this means in practice that he helps him to discard the impediments within his heart which darken his knowledge and make his faith tepid. The heaviest hindrance is self-will, the contrary to God within himself. This is so strong that he must distrust even his good aspirations.[34]

Besides obedience the disciple needs to learn how to pray. Mother Maria emphasises here especially two aspects of prayer life: repentance and unceasing remembrance of God. In line with the way the ascetic fathers understood the Gospels,[35] she says that a true freedom from oneself can be attained only through repentance. And here, again, the mediating role of the *starets* plays a vital role.

The disciple is supposed to reveal all their actions, but also all their desires, feelings and innermost thoughts to the *starets* in the manner of confession. In this sense, confession

> acquired a new, primal significance. It loses in a certain sense its sacramental character and simply grows out of the vital urge of the disciple, of his longing to reach a true judgment of his thoughts and deeds. […] Absolution is not the central purpose but the being drawn out towards the truth.[36]

Because this could happen either individually or in a group, this form of confession as practised by the *startsi* was frequently attacked by the church and it was often not accepted as a form of sacramental confession.[37]

The hesychast quest for unceasing prayer was inspired by a very literal interpretation of the Pauline injunction in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to 'pray without ceasing'. If Scripture spoke about the need for such a state, then it

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[34] Mother Maria, 'The Russian Startzi', p. 18.

[35] See Ivana Noble, 'Свободата и креативността на човека в духовния живот според св. Симеон Нови Богослов и Св. Игнацио Лойола', *Богословска Мисъл*, 16.3–4 (2012), pp. 22–44; 'Žebřík mezi zemí a nebem: Jákobův sen v duchovním výkladu Jana Klimaka a Petre Ţuţea', *Teologická reflexe*, 17.2 (2011), pp. 144–63; 'Religious Experience—Reality or Illusion: Insights from Symeon the New Theologian and Ignatius of Loyola', in *Encountering Transcendence: Contributions to a Theology of Christian Religious Experience*, ed. by Lieven Boeve, Hans Geybels, and Stijn Van den Bossche (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), pp. 375–93.

[36] Mother Maria, 'The Russian Startzi', pp. 18–19.

[37] See Mother Maria, 'The Russian Startzi', p. 19. It may be worth noting here that in many ways such a form of confession was actually older, prior to the changes that came about in the seventh century onwards through the practices of the Irish monks, initially, that led to more private confession.

was seen as something that must be possible. The human body and mind, however, needed to be purified so that the mind could descend to the heart, the centre of human existence, and discover there the gift of wholeness given by baptism, the gift of union with Christ. Mother Maria writes:

> In practise this means the renouncing of all outward stimulation, and of every thought and act of imagination: the becoming an entirely empty vessel: that is the purification of heart. And from here the spirit can ascend to God. It can attain to the pure, unceasing worship of God: to perfect rest, to peace, in the complete turning away from the world and the full turning towards God.[38]

Going back to Nil Sorsky she emphasised the contrast between mechanical prayer and the 'unceasing prayer of the heart which can be prayed during any work or in any situation'.[39] The disciple must learn that prayer in this sense is not primarily what we do. All effort that needs to accompany this experiential recognition is to do with making space so that God may come. And precisely here she recognises that God comes for different people in different ways: 'The way is long and laborious: but in principle, open to all: for laymen also in the midst of the noise of great cities to come to inner silence and prayer'.[40]

Although Mother Maria did not refer to her own experience in Paris, it is not unreasonable to assume that this lay behind her assertions here. Through her relationship with Fr Lev Gillet and Mother Maria Skobtsova in Paris, she had come to find the fullest expression of her own particular Christian faith within the Orthodox tradition. But to do this, and find the need for silence, she had needed to go to Paris and be immersed in work there as a nurse. Although for herself she felt the need for the silence of the monastery, it was not a vocation to be inflicted on all, and if she chose a different monastic path to that of Mother Maria Skobtsova, she never lost sight of the latter's commitment to service of the other, to encounter the other as other in love.[41]

This commitment not to humanity in abstract but to each and every individual with whom we come in contact was central to Mother Maria.[42] So, when she seeks an example of the achievement of sacrifice of the self that she understands as the meaning of the ascetical life, she recalls an encounter with a Mrs Wolff, a Jewish factory worker from South Germany

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[38] Mother Maria, 'The Russian Startzi', p. 13.
[39] Ibid., p. 20.
[40] Ibid., p. 13.
[41] See on this the extracts from her letters in *Mother Maria: Her Life in Letters*, pp. 85–99, a chapter entitled 'The Work of Love'.
[42] See Sister Thekla's introduction, in *Mother Maria: Her Life in Letters*, p. xix.

and a Communist leader during the Nazi period, who was deported to a camp in the south of France, where Mother Maria Gysi used to work with the Red Cross.

> She was brought to us in the last state of starvation, and could hardly walk straight for weakness. Gradually she picked up and was full of gratitude and willingness to help, no bitterness, not a sign of self-pity. Anything could have been asked of her and she would have done it. After several months she had to go back to the camp to make room for others. I had to break it to her. There was not a sound of complaint, of course she would go, she said, having now had such a long and good time […] She had no illusions about what was waiting for her, but was full of compassion for the others who were terribly frightened.[43]

Looking back, this was for her an example of God working even in the most unexpected places, among the Communists, secretly, mysteriously, through those who, once 'being the last, will one day be the first in the Kingdom of Heaven'.[44]

Later, already head of a monastery and experienced in spiritual accompaniment, she would return to offer a final definition of a *starets* in a letter written in 1974. It is perhaps a good place to end this account of her vision:

> You once asked me what a *Staretz* is. I see him at the End-point, with a heart warm and tender and vulnerable, ready every moment to be hurt, and yet never stopping at the hurt (except for a groan!), and so ever *young* to love more and more. No rules of perfection, except the desire to love and a readiness to die for it and be slandered; and eternally misunderstood. It is the fool – the wisest of men, who will not accept the human values as final, perhaps necessary, but never ultimately decisive.[45]

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[43] Mother Maria, 'Communism', in *The Fool and Other Writings*, pp. 49–56 (p. 52). This is reminiscent of the beautiful story of Mother Maria Skobtsova and Trotsky, who came to visit her in Paris in the late 1930s after his exile from the USSR. He knew her because she had briefly been his secretary in 1917, and had been sorely tempted to shoot him! He urged her to flee Paris and Europe, rightly judging that she would fall victim to the Nazis who would inevitably invade. She refused, and so he asked if he could do anything for old time's sake. She told him that he could pay the coal bill, as she was always getting coal on credit, to heat the open house in which she lived and to give to those in need. He did, and, she said, because of that, he would be redeemed.

[44] Mother Maria, 'Communism', p. 52.

[45] *Mother Maria: Her Life in Letters*, p. 65. Letter dated 6 December 1974.

Conclusion

The last quotation from Mother Maria can be taken as description, invitation and challenge. There is no need to compare or differentiate Christian traditions in order to make one appear superior to another, but each tradition can help others as they seek to reflect on their own ways of living out the Christian life. Thus, in conclusion, we can look at some of the questions that are raised by the description of the relationship between a *starets* and their disciple. Mother Maria Gysi herself, as we have seen, already referred to some of the problems associated with the practice, but we will not dwell on those here, but rather seek to find the positive encouragement that the relationship can offer.

According to Mother Maria the *starets* is both called and chosen, by God in the first place, and confirmed by the church. It is not simply something that necessarily goes along with a particular function, but a vocation, and a very specific one. Here the Pauline division of ministries is worth bearing in mind. The *starets* may be fairly useless in other functions—in leadership, or in administration, for example—but her or his task is different. Secondly, this charism is one that must be recognised by the church. In the Orthodox tradition, a *starets* often recognises and even appoints a successor during her or his lifetime. It is, at any rate, important that the person is not self-appointed, but has undergone rigorous training and discipleship, to learn in humility what it is to be a guide to others.

Mother Maria sees the *starets* in an eschatological perspective, 'at the End-point'. This touches on the iconic dimension of the relationship, through which something of the glory of the fullness of life in Christ is glimpsed, because the *starets* has learned to empty themselves so that the light of Christ can shine through them. Whatever language is used to describe this, it is the experience of meeting a holy person, transfused by the love of Christ in a way that can only be described as tangible; and because of this, it is also an encounter with a heart that is warm, tender and perhaps most importantly of all, vulnerable.

This vulnerability means that the starets never enters into a relationship from a position of authority and strength, but of weakness, ready to be hurt, and indeed likely to be hurt. This is again worth bearing in mind. Holiness is not a shield against being hurt and wounded by the actions of others, but it can help to accept it—with a little groan, maybe![46] Although there is no absolute link between being a *starets* and being old—and certainly it is not always the case that age bestows wisdom—there is a necessary degree of experience required. But that experience is always

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[46] For those of a less spiritual disposition, the image that comes to mind here is of Homer Simpson striking his forehead and proclaiming 'Doh!' There is genuine pain and disappointment, but it is accompanied by love that goes even deeper.

somehow transformed and transforming, so that the *starets* remains young, and even in the oldest of such people there is a youthfulness of spirit and of life that shines through.

It is this youthfulness that militates against the presence of rules of perfection. There can be nothing mechanical about Christianity, and the *startsi* are very clear that what is good for one person may not be good for another, so the advice is always specific and tailored for the particular person, even if this may seem to lead to contradictions. The only rule is the rule of love, the desire to love God with all our hearts, our souls and our minds, and our neighbour as ourselves. This alone is worth dying for and thus this alone is worth living for and being misunderstood for. Again, the *starets* will be misunderstood, and there will always be those who will say that what they do is wrong. A structured programme with a checklist is easier to manage than the Holy Spirit, but it may not necessarily be better.

Thus, ultimately, the call of the *starets* is to be the Fool, which is arguably one of the greatest gifts of the Orthodox tradition to Christianity.[47] Of course, this must be rightly understood, and it is not a question of intellectual ability. It is the folly—by the lights of the world—of committing oneself wholly to Christ, through the power of the Spirit, to the glory of the Father. The appeal to the importance of folly is the strongest counterpoint that Orthodoxy itself can image against the other image that it can present, as a religion married firmly to power, and especially to the power of the state. It questions any recourse to identity politics, when 'we' are defined over against the other, a temptation that is as strong in smaller churches as it is in larger ones. The fool seeks only to commit to Christ, and not to create others in his or her own image and likeness.

In exploring the relationship between a *starets* and her or his disciple as described by Mother Maria Gysi, we do of course need to bear in mind that the experiences she refers to, the imagery and words she uses are particular to Orthodoxy, to its tradition of both liturgical and ascetic life. This does not mean that Christians from other traditions cannot benefit from them: on the contrary, provided, however, that we see the analogies as well as their limits as we immerse in the process of translation from one tradition to another, which requires knowing both of the 'languages', even if only one of them is for most of us a mother tongue.

Some of the specific questions that may arise across traditions include asking what it means in such a relationship to give the disciple a place in one's life, one's heart. We may also seek to find what it means to be accountable for the other and ask what the knowledge of the heart of the other means. This knowledge is not ideological and does not stem from arrogance or ignorance, but is a rare spiritual gift, tied not only to the Spirit

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[47] See on this, Mother Maria, 'The Fool', in *The Fool and Other Writings*, pp. 96–103.

that flows where it wills, but also to the kenotic Christ. Moreover, the tradition demands that the one who undertakes the discipline of the journey as guide has to go through all the stages of spiritual life, including that of despair,[48] before he or she finds stability in knowing (experientially) that faith, hope, and love are gifts that we cannot give to ourselves and that we cannot sustain ourselves. In this spirit we wish Parush many years of holy folly, growing in the wisdom of the holy men and women of the communities of faith to which he belongs, and entering more deeply into the mystery of the God who calls each and every one to follow in faith, hope and love.

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[48] Cf. Archimandrite Zacharias, *Christ Our Way and Our Life: A Presentation of the Theology of Archimandrite Sophrony* (South Canaan, Penn.: St Tikhon's Seminary Press, 2003), p. 95.

Reappraising Ministry, Mission and Discipleship
from a Scottish Perspective

Jim Purves

Introduction

In this essay I seek to examine the interplay of ministry and mission, towards the goal of establishing a contemporary local church as an organism that produces and multiplies effective disciples of Jesus Christ. Much of what I say is garnered from my own observations and reflections, gained during the course of my present ministry as Mission and Ministry Advisor to the Baptist Union of Scotland. What is pertinent to this offering is that these observations and reflections have come on the back of what are now fourteen years of privileged involvement in teaching Applied Theology at IBTS under the tutelage of Parush Parushev. I make no claims that what follows represents any opinion of Parush, but I would contend that my perspective and methodology have been hugely influenced by his comprehensive grasp and ownership of contextual convictional theologies.

In the first section, I begin by looking at patterns of present practice in ministry, missional strategy, and discipling that I observe as current within my culture and context. In the second section I go on to correlate challenges regarding practices of ministry, mission, and discipleship among theologians who own convictions relevant to baptist Christians. In the third section I offer some possible trajectories in ministry and mission in seeking to develop disciples within a baptist context.

1. Overview

1.1 Ministry

Scotland is the home of Presbyterianism; the view of 'the minister' that comes with a Reformed ecclesiology is an elevated one. The centrality of the Word of God in Scripture leads too easily to predicate a surrogate centrality for the preacher as 'minister of Word and Sacraments'. That pervasive Reformed emphasis, defining the character and role of 'the minister' within Scottish culture from the sixteenth century onwards, has hugely affected Scottish baptists, reinforced not least by the wider influence of Charles Spurgeon, in nineteenth century England, profiling preaching as a performative act.

Now, I have no quarrel with emphasising the authority and centrality of Scripture. My problem arises when the culture produces a preacher with an idiosyncratic interpretation and application of the Scripture's message, neither tested by nor in dialogue with the believing community of the local church. In a Scottish Presbyterian Reformed setting, where the federal theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith sets the parameters of doctrine and espouses an understanding of church as a gathering of society, with no expectation of a visible believers' church, the preacher does not answer to the congregation, but to the authority of the presbytery. When transferring such a model of ministry practice to a baptist setting, without the oversight of presbytery and with baptists aspiring towards church as believing community, we are too easily led into the questionable practice of a preacher dominating the content of both teaching and Sunday worship before a largely complicit and passive congregation.

This is not to suggest that bad teaching and unaccountability abound in Scottish baptist churches. On the contrary, there is much good preaching and wise leading of congregations. What I offer is something of a caricature of ecclesial practice at its worst. Nonetheless, it is the psyche and attitude that can be engendered by the inherited culture that troubles me here. Where a Christian person thinks of themselves as 'the minister', it connotes the suggestion that others in the congregation are, somehow, 'lesser ministers'. Likewise, when a person construes their function as 'preacher' as essentially authoritative, they can too easily come to assume that their opinion or perspective is exactly that; and the opinion, perspective or contributions of others become secondary or even superfluous. Too easily, if such attitudes are implicitly owned, this can lead to fear on the part of 'the minister' towards deacons' or elders' meetings, or more especially congregational meetings, where their authority or opinion might be challenged; where, in truth, a gathering of leaders or members should be an occasion where there is joy in seeking to discern and affirm the revelation and pleasure of God on the basis of Jesus' affirmation, 'For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them' (Matt 18:20).

Further problems can come through a clash of vocabularies, betraying conflicting mindsets. We have, on the one hand, the believers' church affirmation that 'every member is a minister' while, on the other hand, we have continuing references to 'clergy' and the adoption of ecclesial titles, such as 'Reverend'. There is the frequent reference to the minister as 'pastor', often telescoping a caring and a governing function into the same person as responsible for the primary preaching and teaching role.

All this is not to paint a gloomy picture of ministry; but it is to emphasise that 'the minister' is more likely than not to see themselves as a 'first among equals' rather than 'one among equals', and that many problems

that I observe arising and giving cause to tension at a local congregational level, owe in some measure to the adoption of an inherited model of ministry that is culturally induced rather than Scripturally prescribed. Where a clear understanding of managerial or leadership structure and function, together with avenues of accountability, are identified and owned by a congregation and those others in leadership, catastrophes can be avoided; but where there is not, too often the inevitable outcome is a breakdown of communication and conflict arising due to unarticulated presuppositions being pursued.

A review of the concept of 'ministry' will be essential in what follows, if only to provide some clarity of what we understand it to mean, or should mean, in a baptist context.

1.2 Mission

The mission committee. Most churches would have had one in the recent past. What was it? For some, it would be the group within the church that coordinated support for and corresponded with an overseas Christian worker, a 'link missionary' with the Baptist Missionary Society, or another mission organisation with which a member of the congregation was serving. This group supported and publicised within the congregation's life what was going on, in terms of spreading the gospel, in foreign lands. For others, the mission committee would be a task group, linking with a crusade in Scotland led by a prominent evangelist, such as Louis Palau or Franklin Graham. The mission committee might be a point of liaison and support between the local congregation and the evangelistic event. Or again, the mission committee could be the group within the congregation that would undertake regular visitation and pamphleting around the area of the church, inviting people to come to open their lives to God, believe in Jesus and make the journey to church.

What is mission? This is a valid question, well addressed by my IBTS colleague, Dr Andrew Kirk, in his popular work by the same name. The question that I would raise here is an even more basic one: what is the point of mission? The answer, as James McClendon hazards, might be that,

> Every Christian is commissioned, like Jesus at his baptism, to be
> a missionary. This is made explicit in the Great Commission, a
> marching order that by the baptist vision applies to every disciple
> now as it did then.[1]

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[1] James Wm McClendon, Jr, *Doctrine: Systematic Theology: Volume 2* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abington Press, 1994), p. 419.

But what does that look like, in practice? Implicit within the Scottish model of churchmanship, whatever the denominational tradition, has lingered a Christendom conviction, that the purpose of mission is to draw converts and seekers into the life of the institutional church: Cyprian of Carthage's adage, 'outside the church there is no salvation', has provided an enduring currency. So it is that mission in Scotland, baptist mission not excepted, has more often than not maintained an attractional model, the purpose of which has been to draw seekers and new believers into a context where they might 'come under' the ministry of 'Word and Sacrament'. True, there have been 'outreaches' to others through youth activities and other interest groups; but the ultimate objective has remained much the same: to get folk into church on a Sunday, to come under the authority of the Word of God and the grace met in the sacraments.

Yet the question still lingers: what is the point of mission? And the simplest answer must surely be, 'to make Christian disciples of others'. A recent report into the state of church and Christianity in Scotland suggests that 51% of the population self-identify as Christian, but only 16% claim that their faith has greatly transformed them and 15% have attended church within the previous month.[2] These statistics suggest that a large number of people who self-identity as Christians choose not to go to church. Where this is the case and where an attractional, centripetal model of church prevails, surely something is not quite right?

We will review this model of delivering disciples and review how it might be constructively adjusted in the Scottish context.

1.3 Discipleship

To understand present approaches to discipleship within Scottish churches, it is helpful to note legacies that feature large in the Scottish context: those of Federal Calvinism, Derby and Schofield's Dispensationalism, Revivalism, Charismatic Renewal, and Performative churchmanship.

Federal Calvinism, itself a by-product of the particular form of Reformed theology that found expression out of the Scottish Reformation, focussed on the elective choice of God towards every person, whether that choice was to a destiny of salvation or damnation. Personal choice has little place in such a theological schema. This can lead to intense introspection, calling each person to self-examination and searching for evidence of God's electing grace in their life.

Derby and Schofield's Dispensationalism, growing out of the early nineteenth century, affects not only the many baptist Christians that come

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[2] *Transforming Scotland* (Barna Group, 2015)

from a Brethren background, but the evangelical church at large. In the elaborate scheme of dispensationalism, the salvation offered in this present dispensation is entirely of grace. Unlike the previous and forthcoming dispensations, the present dispensation is not one of works. Indeed, ethical injunctions cannot be considered as pivotal, when the message to be relayed and received is of grace and grace alone. The only act, in such a schema, that is essential to salvation is believing.

Revivalism, emerging in the mid-nineteenth century through the Second Great Awakening, further emphasised the importance of personal decision to place trust in Christ. Whilst propositionally antithetical to Federal Calvinism, this was easily lost sight of when flavoured with an a-ethical dispensationalism under a banner of God's sovereign grace. What mattered was the making of a personal decision to believe, thereby becoming 'saved'.

Charismatic Renewal, in the latter half of the twentieth century, while not first well received in the Scottish baptist context (not only did it clash with the secessionism of Federal Calvinism and Dispensationalism, but it was presented as married to an authoritarian form of churchmanship, known as 'shepherding', that was clearly non-congregational), tended to emphasise the authority of the Holy Spirit expressed through the medium of a prominent or presiding speaker: not hugely different from the prevalent Presbyterian model. It was easily married to an emphasis on a performative leader's authority, whether that be styled as the authority of the preacher, prophet, evangelist, or even apostle.

Performative, as opposed to participative, churchmanship has been reinforced by the use of modern technology. A scripted and annotated digital presentation of sermon or teaching, requiring time-consuming, careful preparation, is in widespread use. A praise band, with microphones and fold-back speakers, has largely replaced choir and guest soloists.

All of these legacies, combined with the inherited model of ministry rehearsed in **1.1**, has led to a present culture of preferring performance over participation; didactic over inductive teaching and participational sharing of Scriptural insights; truth imparted through proposition, rather than an interactive process of teaching and developing disciples.

No equivalent to the all-age Sunday school classes, common in North American churches, exists in the majority of Scottish churches. The only Bible-centred event that most members now attend would be Sunday morning worship. A mid-week meeting for prayer and Bible study remains in a small number of churches, whilst a larger portion of congregations would have house group activities or home Bible studies available during the week; but these would be attended by a minority of members and are more likely to be centred around set study materials, or teaching provided through a group leader.

Interactive or participative materials are more common at the enquirer's level, as evidenced in the extensive use of *Alpha* and *Christianity Explored*. Interactive materials are also in use in focus groups, such as in materials provided by *Care for the Family*. Inductive use of the Scriptures in open-Bible group discussion has not been a significant feature in Scottish, baptist churchmanship.

2. Correlating challenges

2.1 Ministry

In 1.1 it was suggested that there was a dominant model of ministry practised in the Scottish context that could lead to an expression of ministry that could be both elitist and domineering, minimising or even marginalising the ministry of others within a congregation. The danger of such a model extends further than the Scottish context. Stuart and Sian Murray-Williams note the present preoccupation with developing 'discipleship', both in the UK and North America, as a commanding challenge, but observe that part of the sense of inadequacy in producing disciples may well be because of the failure of what they style as 'mono-voiced' expressions of church. The popularity of new-monasticism and a reintroduction of spiritual directors, mentoring, and accountability; *3DM's Lifeshapes*, emphasising 'high accountability/low control'; and in the popularly blended evangelism and discipleship courses such as *Alpha*: all of these and other contemporary currents underline the importance of relationality at the heart of church. Yet critically, the Murray-Williams opine:

> Our underlying concern is that mono-voiced churches tend to create dependency rather than make disciples. And this simply will not do in the contemporary environment, in which we are bombarded on a daily basis by all kinds of ideas, values, presuppositions, assumptions, challenges, and expectations that are rooted in a different understanding of the world from the story the Bible tells […] What we need, if we are to develop creative and thoughtful responses to the many issues that confront us day by day, is the shared experience, knowledge, expertise, and wisdom of the whole community.[3]

Now, I confess, I never really grasped this perspective until moving to 'the other side of the pulpit', in my present role. For over thirty years I had been used to a very participative role as a leader within a local church. I was the

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[3] Stuart and Sian Murray-Williams, *The Power of All* (Harrisonburg, Va.: Herald Press, 2012), pp. 132-33.

pastor and preacher! In my present role, I am able to appreciate much good preaching and well conducted praise and other aspects of worship in churches I have visited; but I have been struck as to how non-participative it feels to simply listen and sing some on a Sunday. The Murray-Williams' thesis, that mono-voiced churches, 'may incubate unhealthy dependency or breed lonely independence; they are not well equipped to make and sustain disciples',[4] is not without merit.

What is also at stake is a vision of what it means to be a baptist church. Church should surely not be oriented around the pre-eminence of a single person's ministry, however valuable that ministry might be. As Nigel Wright puts it, a strong aspect of the baptist vision is to, 'find the essence of church not in historic connectedness but in the living presence of Christ by the Spirit among those who believe; the life of Christ being free and diffused among believers as the living body of Christ'.[5] In this sense, the believers' church is not only defined as gathered around the Scriptures, but as coming together in Christ as 'gathering church', a 'community of disciples',[6] those who have taken up the challenge to holy living[7] and to be,

> joined organically, relationally and spiritually to the other members of that same body. To be the temple of the Holy Spirit requires that same Spirit to take up residence in one's own life and to fuse the temple together as though it were made of living stones. This therefore is no loose affiliation to a religious institution but lively participation in the life of God and God's church.[8]

What needs to be cultivated is a plural ministry that arises out of intentional relationality, expressing the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ alone at the heart of our coming together. What, then, might be the implications of this for those called to our inherited understanding of 'the ministry'? Paul Goodliff, for many years leader of the ministry team at the Baptist Union of Great Britain, emphasises in his forthcoming book, *Shaped For Service*,[9] that it is community itself that must inform and shape the minister within the body of Christ and its received practices; and for this to happen, it takes time for ministers to understand who they are and what they are called to be.[10] Goodliff emphasises that formation takes place through the development of practices: the key issue in the Christian minister's life must be, 'attention to our souls, to our love of Christ, to our walking close with him, to spiritual

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[4] Ibid., p. 135.
[5] Nigel G Wright, *Free Church, Free State* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2011), p. xxiv.
[6] Ibid., p. 51.
[7] Ibid., p. 55.
[8] Ibid., p. 58.
[9] Paul Goodliff, *Shaped For Service* (Publication due, 2016), p. 135.
[10] Ibid., p. 109.

formation'.[11] Practices need to be developed under the oversight of both tutors and existing practitioners who serve as 'apprentice-masters'.[12] Virtues for ministry have to be cultivated, as an expression of personhood and persons in a relationship that is grounded in the very being of God, in our life knit together in Jesus Christ.

Christian ministry cannot be viewed, from a baptist perspective, as simply a personal chrism or calling. Ministry, rooted in Christ, needs to be cultivated, correlated, and integrated into community through practices in relationship with others.

2.2 Mission

Goodliff's insistence on the cultivation of virtuous practices in ministry highlights not only the focus upon the development of inherited patterns of ministry: it underlines his commitment to pursuing meaningful mission. Ministry must be about more than maintaining or making more members within the church. As McClendon puts it,

> When the church's defining character becomes growth, its highest goal the making of converts, then church may be perceived as of little worth in itself: the church exists only as an extrinsic instrument, a means to something that it is not. Then the church preaches a grace it cannot honestly confess because it does not itself embody that grace.[13]

Ministry must be first and foremost about embodiment. What we are is what we beget. In raising the question as to what is the content of the 'good news' that the church shares and the goal or end of mission, McClendon places this in the context of the 'Fellowship of the Spirit'[14] and, in commenting on the huge effect that Pentecostalism has had on the universal church, in enabling practices that embody life-forming convictions, goes on to state,

> I believe that what the Spirit is saying by means of the Pentecostal revival is that all God's children must be pentecostal—since all share the Spirit, since all are called to be missionaries, since all require fellowship in the Spirit. The highly visible ecstasy-and-fellowship of Pentecostals is the Spirit's fresh signal that ecstasy and fellowship are the distinguishing marks of the Spirit of God—

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[11] Ibid., p. 157.
[12] Ibid., p. 163.
[13] McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 439.
[14] Part 3, of the second volume of *Systematic Theology*

the gifts of God who is Spirit and who is coming to us brings us
into intimate relationship with the Spirit and with one another.[15]

The outcome of this must be a deeper embodiment within us, by the Spirit, of who Christ is and what he stands for. Glen Stassen, close friend of McClendon and, like Parushev, another scientist turned theologian, notes that in sharing in the resurrection of Christ, we are risen into formation by Christ. Appealing particularly to the Sermon on the Mount, Stassen affirms that, 'Grace is not formless, but Christomorphic—it takes the shape that is revealed in the incarnate Jesus Christ'.[16] In looking to this work of the Spirit, we need also to look towards the personal paradigm of Jesus' humanity and his social engagement with others, seeking to learn from natural science, through combining different, tiered levels of analysis, as to how we might more fully understand how this call to conformity affects complementary aspects of our lives.[17] Stassen understands that we need to be harnessed into pursuing practices that are transforming initiatives, bringing,

> a sense of God's work among us for connection, compassion, covenant, and the common good. We need markers for God's presence—breakthroughs of deliverance, justice, peacemaking, healing, joy of participation, repentance, and sense of God's presence, as mustard seeds of God's present action, God's reign.[18]

Michael Gorman, in his recently published *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation and Mission*,[19] takes this further in claiming that in the Pauline corpus we also see a call, 'not merely to believe the gospel but to become the gospel, and in so doing to participate in the very life and mission of God'.[20] Gorman stresses the integral relationship of being and act conjoined together. The development and growth of virtues as part of our character, together with pursuing practices that demonstrate and improve on these, cannot be pulled apart.[21] Critical to Gorman's understanding of the Christian life is his reading of faith (πιστις) as the practice of 'faithfulness': something more than intellectual assent, where faith's meaning is better conveyed with expressions such as, '"believing allegiance", "faithful allegiance", or

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[15] McClendon, *Doctrine*, pp. 437-8.
[16] Glen Stassen, *A Thicker Jesus* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminister John Knox Press, 2012), Kindle, location 3688.
[17] Stassen, *A Thicker Jesus*, location 2180.
[18] Stassen, *A Thicker Jesus*, location 5297.
[19] Michael J Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation and Mission* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2015).
[20] Ibid., p. 2.
[21] Ibid., p. 9.

"trusting loyalty"'.[22] This should lead to faith manifested in an embodied manner, bringing expressions of hope and demonstrations of love.

Where faith is understood as a practice, birthed through the initiative of the Spirit of God working in our lives, our view of other Christian practices is also fundamentally changed. In speaking of justice and righteousness in relationship together, Gorman makes an observation that might be true of biblical virtues as a whole: they are not simply ethical principles, but comprehensive, covenantal, relational mandates, rooted in our response to the character of God as He meets with us.[23] In this respect, the relational aspects of justice and righteousness mean that their synergy need be expressed communally, and not simply in an inward, individualistic way. The transformation that comes through our participation in Christ is indeed personal, but extends interpersonally into the relational matrix of community. Community is the context in which 'saving justice' is expressed.[24] For Gorman, the ministry of church is therefore always essentially missional, for Paul is calling churches to be, 'communities of Spirit-enabled Christlike Godliness, of righteousness and (cruciform) glory in anticipation of God's final glory and their participation in it'.[25]

2.3 Discipleship

Mike Pears, Director of *Urban Life* and a recent doctoral graduate of the IBTS Centre in Amsterdam, further develops this understanding of embodiment, critical to owning an engagement in mission that cultivates discipleship.

Pears identifies a tension between inherited, spiritual, and sacramental expressions of Christian faith on the one hand, and the practical work in addressing specific issues of social injustice and deprivation on the other. He perceives the need to overcome this tension by developing 'convictional communities', where there is intentional development of 'virtues that the Christian community understands as descriptive of Jesus himself'. In this way, theology must be embodied within the very character of the community: 'theology is something they enact rather than simply talk about'.[26]

For Pears, effective engagement in mission that develops discipleship requires of the Christian believer both Christomorphic embodiment and participational involvement in the life of others. For this, we need to engage

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[22] Ibid., p. 91.
[23] Ibid., p. 213.
[24] Ibid., p. 226.
[25] Ibid., p. 271.
[26] Paul Cloke, Justin Beaumont and Andrew Williams (eds.), *Working Faith* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2013), p. 87.

with people in a way that acknowledges our own frailties and vulnerabilities, for,

> Vulnerability is arguably the essence of the parable of the yeast in the dough (Matt. 13.13)—it is the quality of smallness that enables the yeast to become deeply and irretrievably embedded in its context. Yet it is precisely this quality that enables the whole dough to rise. Vulnerability, or smallness, it seems, is a prerequisite for social transformation—at least, non-violent social transformation.[27]

Pears further develops his understanding in his doctoral thesis, arguing for the need to create what he styles as 'Jesus-Space' for people to engage in. Developing discipleship requires involvement with others, as well as in meeting with others, in a place where there is a foretaste of what is to come, in the fullness of Christ's Kingdom. Critically, this relational space has to be that place where vulnerability is present, not one where the Christian expresses dominance, power, and personal entitlement. Jesus-Space therefore has to be a spatial, redemptive-place, where,

> the spatial embodiment of the Cross which removes dividing walls between those who were enemies and estranged so that a new social and spatial proximity, or place of embrace, is established. Therefore the formation of redemptive-place cannot be conceived of as an autonomous activity; just as participation in the Spirit is fundamental in the conversion of a person, so too it is in the transformation of place. In addition, the work of the Spirit is seen primarily in relation to the person of difference, the stranger, the enemy: the Spirit is located in the space between the self and the other, convening a new kind of relationship and therefore a new kind of relational space.[28]

The implications of this approach bring a challenge for all of us who are neither marginalised nor poor, more used to pursuing discipleship in a personalised, protected, and comfortable environment. Ash Barker (who relocated from Singapore and is presently church planting in conjunction with the *Message Trust* in Birmingham), in defending the legitimacy of describing truly Christian mission as 'incarnational mission', cites the case where,

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[27] Ibid., p. 107.
[28] Mike Pears, *Towards a Theological Engagement with an Area of Multiple Deprivation: The Case of the Cornwall Estate* (Unpublished doctoral thesis, IBTS Centre, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2015).

Shane Claiborne once surveyed a group that described themselves as 'strong followers of Jesus'. He asked, 'Did Jesus spend time with the poor?' Around eighty percent of the group replied 'yes'. Just think for a moment about who Jesus spent his life, miracles, death and resurrection with, and it is shocking that 20% missed what should be obvious. Shane then asked this same group, 'Do you spend time with the poor?' This time only 2% replied 'yes'. My question is not so much if these numbers are a true reflection of the broader church, though I think they might be. It's the question, 'why is this the reality for this group of strong followers of Jesus?' Why is there such a gap between the stated priorities of Jesus (Luke 4:18-19) and his contemporary disciples?[29]

Bryan Stone, in *Evangelism after Christendom*, recognises that the task is to graft Christians into the story of Christ and his Church in the Bible, to produce, 'a faithful, virtuous witness to God's peace'.[30] The challenge is, 'to relearn the practice of bearing faithful and embodied witness',[31] insofar as, 'the prevailing emphasis in our time on technique and effectiveness must be subordinated to the greater emphasis on holy virtues, acquired and formed within the fellowship of the Holy Spirit'.[32]

In going on to speak of the significance of Jesus in modelling our evangelism, Stone notes,

> This 'space' for God's reign is not simply a geographical location, but it does have its own 'geography'. It is characterised by tangible practices of eating, sharing, meeting, and service. Jesus' evangelism is not just the preaching of a message but the gathering together of a new family, a new household.[33]

It is this embodying of Christlike community that makes the invitation to 'come and see' possible. Disciples need consciously to resist the dominating powers of this age that seek to draw us into an egocentric, individualistic, false spirituality. Where we become captive to or capitulate to the seductive powers of the present age, we find ourselves embroiled within something quite different from the salvation Jesus proffers: a falsehood, where,

> Evangelism can now be focused wholly on 'effectively' leading the individual into an experience of salvation as a matter of personal freedom by appealing to his or her self interest, whether

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[29] Ash Barker, *Slum Life Rising* (Melbourne: Urban Neighbours of Hope, 2012), Kindle, location 2851.
[30] Bryan Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2007), p. 52.
[31] Ibid., p. 21.
[32] Ibid., p. 45.
[33] Ibid., p. 79.

that be construed materially in terms of social belonging, assimilation, uplift, prosperity, and security or spiritually in terms of inner peace or the hope of eternal salvation.[34]

Discipleship is surely something far more than this; it is the forming of a life disciplined to grow into the same virtues, the same convictions, and engage in the same practices as Jesus Christ Himself. It is through the forming of such ministry, enabled by the Holy Spirit, that the narrative of Christ's story and the narrative of our story are brought together to be one and the same.[35]

3. Trajectories

In section 2, we have traced informed challenges to culturally conditioned expressions of ministry by theologians committed to encouraging the development of virtues, convictions and practices that we would recognise as baptist, in terms of what we aspire to be and confess together in our Baptist Union of Scotland's Declaration of Principle:

> 1. That the Lord Jesus Christ our God and Saviour is the sole and absolute Authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and that each Church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer His laws.
> 2. That Christian Baptism is the immersion in water into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, of those who have professed repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for our sins according to the Scriptures; was buried and rose again the third day.
> 3. That it is the duty of every disciple to bear witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to take part in the evangelisation of the world.

In this final section, we rehearse some of the steps that we have taken and need to further develop in pursuing this path.

3.1 Ministry

How might healthy development of effective, multi-voiced church be best managed? Part of the answer must lie with those who, wittingly or not, occupy hegemonies of power and authority, through engaging in the practice of reappraising their own understanding of priorities within ministry. There are few in leadership who would disagree that healthy growth is a good thing;

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[34] Ibid., p. 151.
[35] Ibid., p. 108.

or that church growth, in itself, is not necessarily the predicate of heathy church. First steps begin with adjusting the attitude of the Christian leader to their understanding of ministry, both their own and others.

Where it is acknowledged that the call to ministry, leading or not, is always a call to growth into a deeper Christomorphic conformity, then the call to ministry will be understood as a call to disinvestment: a disinvestment of power, prestige, and preferential treatment. This disinvesting, or kenotic act, is counter-intuitive in a society where self-discovery and self-fulfilment are primary and desirable goals of life. Indeed, the journey of faith is a risk, not in terms of believing in the unbelievable, but in that it involves us relinquishing the right of self-determination and self-vindication, trusting that the one who calls us to join us in His death is also able, by His Spirit, to bring us to share in the triumph of His resurrection.

The person sensing God's call to a ministry that would lead and enable others to discover and develop a walk with Jesus Christ, has to come to terms with the fact that such a profoundly virtue-based understanding of ministry is not the cultural norm. Ministry is more often defined by practices inherited from Christendom models of church, holding the ordained minister as preacher and care-giver, yet also primarily responsible in leading the church into strategies of church growth. Those preparing for and entering ministry will have to decide whether to be complicit in this pattern or not. Superficial indicators of success that are based on performance need be resisted and a deeper delving into practices that reflect Christlike virtues encouraged and affirmed. A minister who is called to lead needs to be encouraged to model a life that demonstrates, above all, their own commitment to Christomorphic convictions and practices as being the crucible out of which healthy congregational life and growth is forged.

In the Baptist Union of Scotland, as evidenced in our *Ministry Handbook,* freely available from our website, we are seeking to emphasise that those recognised—accredited by us—as fitted and commended for serving in principal roles of leadership among our churches, should be viewed as facilitators for the ministry of the whole congregation, not simply fulfillers of their own calling to preach, teach, and reach.

What is counter-intuitive for our accredited ministers is also, however, counter-intuitive for congregations that have been tutored to be consumers. To encourage Christians who have understood church as an event of passive listening into entering an understanding of church as a participative, contributive exercise is no simple thing. Ministers can also be fearful of encouraging people to offer insights and opinions as well as exercising new areas of ministry, simply because it opens a Pandora's box of potential problems in facilitating communication and managing conflict: skills which few ministers have, until recently, received training in. In seeking to address

this challenge within our Scottish Union we have recently introduced basic training in conflict management and leadership skills into our accreditation process, requiring all our accredited ministers to commit themselves to a process of continuing ministerial development.

The deeper challenge lies in seeking to develop church as a counter-cultural environment where virtuous practices are held and valued above all. Congregations want to grow. Full time, stipendiary ministries are not cheap and people are needed to pay for them. That apart, success in church is still often measured in terms of the numbers of people gathered into one place at one time on a Sunday morning and the size of the congregational bank balance. On the other hand, there is a growing awareness and ownership by those entering into accredited ministry that they may well have to earn a living through some means other than in service to a congregation. Accredited ministry has to be viewed as an office to which those recognised as fitted for Christlike leadership are entrusted.

3.2 Mission

In the face of an increasingly consumer-driven, ethically sterile society, there is a need to recognise that proclamation of the gospel unaccompanied by intentional participation in the life of Christ, patently displayed in the life of a congregation, is no witness at all. We need to clearly affirm that there can be no authentic proclamation of the gospel without the evidenced presence of lives that reflect what that journey of repentance and faith looks like; and that part of such Christian profession must find expression in unashamedly reaching out to others in Christlike mission. Embodiment matters; and we need to further explore and embrace what implications that affirmation might carry.

The Baptist Union of Scotland, through its Mission Initiative Group, has identified the need to focus on priorities in encouraging and supporting mission, including the need to reach out to Scotland's poorest people. We look to the means of promoting and encouraging this, as well as in encouraging the development of churches in under-reached areas of Scotland. This combined focus means that there is a conscious momentum in looking towards poorer urban areas, which tend to be the most heavily populated, least churched areas of the country. At present, we are developing a partnership with *The Message Trust*, based in Manchester, as well as with other organisations that seek to serve the church in reaching the poor and marginalised.

What does this type of missional investment look like? If we concede that it is an embodied presence that gives credibility to the message proclaimed, then part of it must lie in encouraging multi-voiced witness

made up of teams of people. This policy is presently being pursued as we look to recruit men and women who would be prepared to become teams of disciples living and witnessing together as part of a local congregation.

3.3 Discipleship

What does it means to make 'disciples'? Pears' understanding of Jesus-Space is, I believe, a profoundly helpful concept for us to develop and pursue. It is distinctly different from the notion of 'liminal space', as current in missional writing. Liminal space is that 'in between' space that can be found between the culture of church and the culture that people in society around us inhabit. Liminal space is the place where there is the possibility of meaningful engagement between Christian and not-yet-Christian. Pears' notion of Jesus-Space takes us a step further in that it calls the church to re-examine the space and the place that it inhabits and populates as church, calling us to travel on further in the practice of being church, into practicing the virtues that mark the pursuit of Christomorphic conformity and witness in the life of the congregation.

Where we are to be true to the third part of our Declaration of Principle, everything we do as church together should be in pursuit of forming and making disciples. This calls us to re-examine our practice as church together, consciously 'disavowing', as Wright encourages us, any longing to conform to patterns of ministry found in churches that emphasise simply historic connectedness, but rather look to and trust in the living presence of Christ by the Spirit among us, guiding us and enabling us to pursue His mission.[36]

The great liberty that such a Christomorphic focus calls us into is freedom from the constant need to rephrase, redefine, and invent new mission strategies, for the strategy is quite simply to 'be like and behave like Jesus'. The virtues that Goodliff calls ministers to are those to be cultivated by the whole congregation. This in turn calls us, as McClendon urges, to a deeper dependency on the Spirit of Pentecost working in our lives; but also, as Stone summons us, to relearn what it means to bear faithful, embodied witness to Jesus Christ.

Convictions manifest through embodied practices. This is at the heart of what Parush Parushev has encouraged others to look towards. We are the richer for it.

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[36] Nigel Wright, *Disavowing Constantine* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000).

Discipleship as Deconstruction

David McMillan

Introduction

Over the years of my involvement with IBTS in Prague and now in Amsterdam as the IBTS Centre, Parush Parushev's persuasive promotion of James McClendon's theological method has, for me, provided a helpful way of revisiting my understanding of my own context in Northern Ireland. The confusing matrix of politics, religion, and identity that resists the achievement of any meaningful reconciliation of the history of the past one-hundred years is not resolved, but can be better understood through the convictional lens. Furthermore, Parush's friendship with the late Glen Stassen proved to be a great blessing for many of us as we were enthusiastically introduced to the concept of Just Peacemaking. Parush and Glen, with their shared and distinctive understanding of convictional language and ethics, modelled the highest standards of professional academic engagement along with warm Christian fellowship and mutual respect.

In this paper I intend to reflect on the significance of the use of the Bible and the biblical concept of covenant in the politics of 1912 in Ireland. The use of a hymn, based on biblical text, written in the eighteenth century and appropriated by Protestants in Northern Ireland during the period 1912 and beyond will serve as a focus for the reflection. The purpose of the paper is to illustrate that the form of Christian discipleship manifest in any context will be determined by the pre-existing convictions and practices that, without the kind of critical appraisal and revision suggested by Glen Stassen, can create a culture that runs contrary to the values of the Kingdom of God.

Covenants and convictions

Ireland in 1912 was a place in turmoil. The British parliament were debating yet another Home Rule bill for Ireland (there had been two previous attempts at such a bill in 1886 and 1893) in an attempt to resolve the persistent dilemma of how to manage Ireland. For many in Ireland the bill was unsatisfactory because it maintained British control of the island and denied full Irish statehood. For many others (mainly Protestants in the North Eastern Province of Ulster) the bill was unsatisfactory because they feared it would leave them at the mercy of a Roman Catholic dominated government that would, as they saw things, put at risk their civil and religious liberties as well as being the first step along the road to strip them of their British identity

and place in the British Empire. The response of Ulster Protestants to this perceived threat was a mixture of prayers, psalms, politics, and gun running.

When drawing attention to the use of biblical imagery in the justifying of moral, social, and political opinions[1] Thomson, citing the work of Bruce and that of Akenson[2], illustrates the significance of the concept of Covenant in the thinking of Northern Irish Protestants. He argues that with roots in the Covenanting tradition of Scottish Presbyterianism of the seventeenth century, a strong Calvinistic theology and the gelling of Presbyterian and Anglican interests through the rise of evangelicalism in the nineteenth century, it is possible to understand something of the significance of the relationship between religion—in which the Bible plays a crucial role—identity and politics.

Similarly, Holmes, when exploring issues of Presbyterian identity and politics in the period from 1798-1914,[3] provides valuable insight on the dynamic at work in the forging of a common purpose in opposition to Home Rule among Presbyterians and other Protestants of diverse opinions and theological positions. Holmes tracks the development of a distinctive and contextual evangelicalism in Irish Presbyterianism, including the recovery of appreciation of Scottish Covenanter roots and principles epitomised by the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643. Holmes observes:

> In the case of Presbyterianism in Ireland, the specific type of evangelicalism that developed in the early nineteenth century [...] sought to bring the denomination back to the theological and spiritual priorities of seventeenth century Scottish and Irish Presbyterianism. In particular, they went back to the Scottish Second Reformation of the mid-seventeenth century that was expressed through the National Covenant of 1638 and the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643.[4]

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[1] Alwyn Thomson, *Fields of Vision: Faith and Identity in Protestant Ireland* (Belfast: ECONI, 2002), p. 61.

[2] Steve Bruce, *The Edge of the Union: The Ulster Loyalist Political Vision* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).Donald H Akenson, *God's Peoples : Covenant and Land in South Africa, Israel, and Ulster* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

[3] For a summary of events in Scotland and Ireland, particularly in relation to Presbyterianism in the preceding century see Edwards, 'The Wars of Religion Begin' in Ruth Dudley Edwards, *The Faithful Tribe:An Intimate Portrait of the Loyal Institutions* (London: HarperCollins, 1999). For a summary of events in Ireland and how developments in the North and the South fed the fears and determination of both Protestants in the North and Catholics across the island, see Patterson 'The Legacy of Partition' in Henry Patterson, *Ireland since 1939: The Persistence of Conflict*, [New ed.] ed. (Dublin: Penguin Ireland, 2006)., pp. 164ff. Whelan provides a detailed survey of the influence of evangelicalism in the period 1800-1840 in Irene Whelan, *The Bible War in Ireland : The "Second Reformation" and the Polarization of Protestant-Catholic Relations, 1800-1840* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005).

[4] A R Holmes, 'Covenanter Politics: Evangelicalism, Political Liberalism and Ulster Presbyterians, 1798-1914,' *The English Historical Review* CXXV, 513 (2010), p. 5. See also Marianne Elliott, *When God Took Sides : Religion and Identity in Ireland - Unfinished History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 121ff.

The covenant of 1643 set out the terms for the establishment and defense of Reformed religion in Scotland, England, and Ireland. It was approved by both houses of the British parliament, the Church of Scotland, and the leaders of the Church in England. It was ratified by Act of Parliament in 1644 and so is considered by many as forever binding on these three nations and their peoples.

As well as setting out the promotion and defense of Reformed religion, the Covenant was clear in regard to the heresy of Roman Catholicism and committed to the maintenance of the union of the three Kingdoms—Ireland, Scotland, and England:

> we shall in like manner, without respect of persons endeavour the extirpation of Popery, Prelacy, […] superstition, heresy, schism, profaneness, and whatsoever shall be found to be contrary to sound doctrine and the power of godliness, lest we partake in other men's sins, and thereby be in danger to receive of their plagues; and that the Lord may be one, and his name one, in the three kingdoms.
>
> We shall also, with all faithfulness, endeavour the discovery of all such as have been or shall be incendiaries, malignants, or evil instruments, by hindering the reformation of religion, dividing the king from his people, or one of the kingdoms from another, or making any faction or parties among the people, contrary to this League and Covenant.

Holmes argues that 'In response to the threat of Home Rule, the rhetoric of 17th Century Covenanter politics provided the theological, ideological and political planks that were necessary to construct a Presbyterian anti-Home Rule platform'.[5] This 'anti-Home Rule platform' was not exclusively the common ground of conservative and liberal Presbyterians but was shared by the wider Protestant community, including other non-conformists and Anglicans with whom Presbyterians were not natural allies.

A new 'Ulster Covenant' was drawn up which was consciously modelled on the Scottish covenants of the seventeenth century. It was much shorter than the seventeenth century covenant:

> Being convinced in our consciences that Home Rule would be disastrous to the material well-being of Ulster as well as the rest of Ireland, subversive of our civil and religious freedom, destructive of our citizenship and perilous to the unity of the Empire, we whose names are underwritten, men of Ulster, loyal subjects of His Gracious Majesty King George V, humbly relying on the God whom our fathers in days of stress and trial confidently

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[5] Holmes, 'Covenanter Politics', p. 28

> trusted, do hereby pledge ourselves in solemn Covenant throughout this time of threatened calamity to stand by one another in defending for ourselves and our children our cherished position of equal citizenship in the United Kingdom and in using all means which may be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a Home Rule Parliament in Ireland. And in the event of such a Parliament being forced upon us we further solemnly and mutually pledge ourselves to refuse to recognise its authority.

Most Protestants, whether Presbyterians or not, were willing and eager to sign the Ulster Covenant.[6] The sense of a common identity and the shared fear of a Catholic ascendancy, represented by the possibility of Home Rule, were not created merely by economic, cultural, social, or historical considerations [7] but by some common core convictions nurtured in a narrative that spanned centuries. The Ulster Covenant was never to serve the same function as, say, a confession of faith, which would be explicit in its theological expressions, nor could the Ulster Covenant be as specific as the Scottish covenants, which were couched in Presbyterian terminology for an essentially Presbyterian community. However, it did manage to tap into and encapsulate the essential core religious and political convictions that lay beneath the various denominational distinctives that traditionally kept the Protestant community fractured and disunited.

All the historical records make clear that the preparations for and execution of the signing of the Ulster Covenant were bathed in religious rhetoric and fervour.[8] Indeed, as Mitchell argues it would appear to be the case that 'Religious ideas of covenant take on a heightened political

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[6] There was also the Ulster Women's Declaration, a related but slightly amended version of the Ulster Covenant which supported the concept of 'all means necessary' but did not commit the women in the same terms.

[7] Bardon provides a masterly overview of the factors shaping the Protestant response to Home Rule; see his chapter 'The Ulster Crisis' in Jonathan Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, new updated ed. (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2005), pp. 385ff.

[8] Beckett records, in keeping with all historians of the period, that 'the ceremonial signing of this document—"Ulster's solemn league and covenant"—was conducted in an atmosphere of religious devotion, and blessed by clergy and ministers of the Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian church and other Protestant denominations'; J C Beckett, *The Making of Modern Ireland 1603-1923* (London: Faber, 1966), p. 428. Not all Protestants and certainly not all Presbyterians were in sympathy with the Covenant. McKay records the response of Armour, a Presbyterian minister who 'claimed that "Home Rule is a Presbyterian principle"'. He denounced Carson as 'a sheer mountebank, the greatest enemy of Protestantism in my opinion […]'; Susan McKay, *Northern Protestants: An Unsettled People*, New updated ed. (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2005), p. 245. Stewart records that Armour continued to denounce the political developments that flowed from the Ulster Covenant so that when the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 partitioning Ireland was passed, Armour is reported to have said, 'For years they have been yelling against Home Rule, and now they have got a form of Home Rule which the Devil himself could not have devised'; A T Q Stewart, *The Narrow Ground: Aspects of Ulster, 1609-1969* (London: Faber, 1977), p. 173.

resonance in periods wrought with Protestants' insecurity about Britain's commitment to them, and Catholic threats from within'.[9]

On Easter Tuesday, 9 April 1912, a huge rally known as the Ulster Unionist Demonstration was held in Belfast marking the beginning of organized opposition to the prospect of Home Rule. Bardon describes the event:

> Seventy special trains brought in one hundred thousand loyalist demonstrators who, after marching past the platforms, listened to the opening prayers by the Church of Ireland primate and the moderator of the Presbyterian Church and joined in singing Psalm 90.[10]

The Public Records Office (PRO) in Belfast now has a section of its website dedicated to the Ulster Covenant and records that the signing of the Covenant was conducted 'in an atmosphere of near religious fervour, appearing to many like a crusade, with comparisons being drawn between the Ulster Covenant and the Old Testament Covenant of the Israelites'.[11] Throughout Ulster many churches held services during which they prayed for divine help and intervention and at the same time sought to encourage their members to sign the Ulster Covenant. The PRO website records that 'the favoured hymn being "O God, our help in ages past" was a common feature of the services'.

On Ulster Day, Saturday 28 September 1912, the day for the public signing of the covenant, some 237,368 men and 234,046 women signed the respective Covenants.

The image of covenant, mythologised through a shared hermeneutical reading of the biblical text from within a rich historical religious tradition, served as a potent and significant element of Protestant self-understanding, particularly in the context of political instability and insecurity. The power of religious imagery and allusion in giving voice to the preservation of and transmission of deeply held convictions cannot be underestimated. Morrow, reflecting on the work of Ricoeur, speaks of religious images in Irish Protestantism carrying 'profound resonances' and religious terminology not necessarily serving as 'a statement of doctrine, but [...] a description of the moral universe to which both doctrine and reason speak'.[12]

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[9] Claire Mitchell, *Religion, Identity and Politics in Northern Ireland: Boundaries of Belonging and Belief* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 123. Mitchell would argue, rightly, that in the changing context of Northern Ireland society the concept of covenant carries much less weight than previously, p. 125.

[10] Bardon, *A History of Ulster,* pp. 434-5.

[11] http://www.proni.gov.uk/index/search_the_archives/ulster_covenant/ulster_day.htm. See also Bardon, *A History of Ulster,* pp. 437ff.

[12] Duncan Morrow, 'Fundamentalist Protestantism' in Peter Shirlow and Mark McGovern, eds, *Who Are "the People"? : Unionism, Protestantism and Loyalism in Northern Ireland* (London: Pluto, 1997), p. 57.

To make sense of how this hermeneutical approach may have worked in practice we could borrow from the work of Baptist theologian James McClendon. McClendon summarises what he calls the 'baptist vision'[13] with the rubric 'this is that, then is now'. McClendon reflects on the fact that Baptists have no central creed or authoritative structure, yet manage to find a commonality which gives meaning to the term 'Baptist'. In common with others he identifies the core elements of what is understood as the distinguishing marks of Baptists: Biblicism; Liberty; Discipleship; Community; Mission, with no one of the marks serving as the 'organizing principle'.[14] The unifying factor, 'the guiding pattern by which people shape their thought and practice as that people or combination'[15], is found in a hermeneutical principle which McClendon summarises as 'this is that, then is now'. He contends that Baptist communities approach scripture with a

> shared awareness of the present Christian community as the primitive community and consider themselves at one with that of which we read in the New Testament. They read the biblical text as for themselves in the present, not merely as a historical document—'this is that'.[16]

The text 'is interpreting the present situation'[17] of the present faith community. Furthermore, when the community reads in the text the vision of the yet to be fulfilled Kingdom of God it reads the vision of the Kingdom to come as normative for the ordering of life in the community now—'then is now'. Coherence is achieved, not by simply sharing certain marks—which are not necessarily unique to Baptists anyway—but by virtue of this shared hermeneutical approach.

I would suggest that McClendon's rubric 'this is that and then is now' can be appropriated to give additional insight as to how Protestantism, with all its diversity and denominational distinctiveness[18], managed to share a common vision in 1912 and beyond. The key is not so much a shared

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[13] James W McClendon, Jr, *Ethics: Systematic Theology, Vol.1*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), p. 27.

[14] Ibid., p. 30

[15] Ibid., p. 27

[16] McClendon is borrowing from the statement of Peter on the day of Pentecost. When speaking to the onlookers he is recorded as saying 'this is that...'and goes on to say, 'This is not merely a reading strategy by which the church can understand Scripture;[…] it is the way of Christian existence itself'. McClendon, *Ethics*, pp. 32-33.

[17] Ibid., p. 33

[18] For a good overview of the religious and social distinctions and differences among Protestant denominations in the lead up to the period prior to 1912, see Hempton and Hill's chapter 'Home Rule and the Protestant mind 1860-90' in David Hempton and Myrtle Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism in Ulster Society, 1740-1890* (Routledge, 1992), pp. 161-187.

confession or creed as a shared historically shaped hermeneutic.[19]This shared hermeneutic is focused on the concept and significance of covenant in the Old Testament. The focus on covenant facilitates the construction of a common identity as it reads the biblical text in a 'this is that, then is now' manner. Irish Protestants, as a people believing themselves to be in covenant with God, tended to have an expectation that the theocratic vision of society in the Hebrew Scriptures should be normative for shaping their social and political life. Because of the significance of covenant it is deemed possible to say 'this is that' of which we read. Furthermore, the trials and challenges of Israel provide a rich source of material by which it was possible to understand and address their present difficulties, for as was 'then' for Israel is 'now' for us—a reverse application of McClendon's principle. This is not merely a process of living in the past, or someone else's past. This is a reading strategy that reinvests each new challenge and set of circumstances with a fresh expression of covenant thinking and expectation of divine intervention. It is not that a community thinks it is like the Old Testament covenant people, rather it chooses to see itself as a contemporary expression of the covenant people and addresses each contemporary challenge or onslaught with the expectation that the story, and glory, of ancient Israel will be played out in fresh ways in the towns and villages of the North of Ireland.[20]

Convictional reinforcement

The biblical text was not only appropriated to provide a 'this is that' and inverted 'then is now' reading of the contemporary situation by use of the concept of covenant, but also through a particular worship practice highlighted in the Public Records reports mentioned earlier, namely the use of Isaac Watts' (1674-1749) hymn 'O God our help in ages past'.

The hymn is based on Psalm 90 and prefaced as 'A prayer of Moses, the man of God'. The psalm addresses the experience of the covenant people

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[19] In using the term 'historically shaped hermeneutic' I am borrowing from Gadamer's concept of 'historically shaped consciousness', acknowledging that a hermeneutical approach is not arrived at in a vacuum.

[20] John D Brewer and Gareth I Higgins, *Anti-Catholicism in Northern Ireland, 1600-1998 : The Mote and the Beam* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), p. 83, suggest that 'the cultural hegemony was supplied by conservative evangelicalism rather than by Presbyterian theology'. This analysis is flawed on two counts. Firstly, as Hempton and Hill, writing about the period at the end of the nineteenth century point out, 'Important though the influence of evangelicalism was in forging an Ulster Protestant identity it would be misleading to present late nineteenth century Irish Protestantism in crudely monolithic terms', Hempton and Hill, *Evangelical*, p. 184. Secondly, Brewer and Higgins' analysis fails to appreciate that evangelicalism could not provide the necessary organizing principle to galvanize the diversity of Protestant opinion that coalesced around the Covenant. Indeed, they have set up a false dichotomy in suggesting that the choice is between conservative evangelicalism and Presbyterian theology. We would contend that the commonality was a shared hermeneutical approach to the Covenant of the Old Testament, whether shared out of conviction or convenience.

of God as they seek to make sense of life under God's wrath. The psalm begins with a statement of appreciation and praise:

> Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations.
> Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God (1-2).

Yet the core of the psalm recounts the terrifying reality of human finiteness under the hand of God and indeed the wrath of God, for example:

> You turn men back to dust, saying, 'Return to dust, O sons of men' (3).
> We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation (7).
> Relent O Lord! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants [...] (13).

The rest of the psalm, a much smaller portion, implores God for respite and renewal in terms such as:

> Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days (14).
> Let the favour of the Lord our God be upon us, and prosper the work of our hands [...] (17).

The psalm therefore consists of an opening declaration of praise, followed by (for the greater part) a lament sung under the wrath of God and pleads for respite and renewal in its conclusion.

The hymn that Watts wrote, based on Psalm 90 is, interestingly, devoid of the themes of the wrath and anger of God. Although commonly sung as six verses it was originally nine verses long. The first three verses of the hymn expand on the first two verses of the Psalm and the final verse of the hymn repeats the opening verse.

> Our God, our help in ages past,
> Our hope for years to come,
> Our shelter from the stormy blast,
> And our eternal home.
>
> Under the shadow of Thy throne
> Thy saints have dwelt secure
> Sufficient is Thine arm alone,
> And our defense is sure.

> Before the hills in order stood,
> Or earth received her frame,
> From everlasting Thou art God,
> To endless years the same.

The remaining five original verses were devoid of the themes of wrath and anger and developed instead the themes of the frailty and transient nature of human life; more contemporary versions include only two of these original five verses:

> A thousand ages in Thy sight
> Are like an evening gone;
> Short as the watch that ends the night
> Before the rising sun.

> Time, like an ever rolling stream,
> Bears all its sons away;
> They fly, forgotten, as a dream
> Dies at the opening day.

The effect is to heighten an emotional and wistful expression of trust in God.

Watts was not averse to writing about the themes of wrath, anger and the final judgment, but in this hymn he chose to rework this strongly covenant orientated psalm. Watts came from a seventeenth century dissenting family, part of a community under threat from more powerful forces and bearing a strong Calvinist theology. In the hymn he created an expression of the confidence of the covenant community in the protection and providence of God. While the hymn has been appropriated in many national crises and situations where the themes of covenant may not have been as significant as the expression of hope in the face of human frailty, it is interesting that in the Irish context it has been appropriated precisely for its covenant overtones.

The use of songs and hymns is an important part of the liturgical and worship practices in Protestant culture, partly because of the self-imposed limitations on other means of religious symbolism in worship and liturgy. Reformed theology tends to abhor the visual representations of Catholicism and Orthodoxy; consequently, the only symbolic furniture beyond pulpit, baptistery, and communion table in most Presbyterian and other non-conformist church buildings tends to be memorial plaques to past ministers or those who died in the world wars. In Church of Ireland churches (Episcopal) this may extend to stained glass windows, military flags, and liturgical altar coverings. The song or the hymn, therefore, plays a critical

part in the communal life of the faith community as it rehearses its narrative, teaches its theology, and reinforces its convictions.

During the upheaval over Home Rule in Ireland, when the Ulster Covenant was being presented to the Protestant community for signing, Watts' hymn featured in the services and public rallies.[21] The use of the hymn as an expression of a covenant community's trust in God in times of uncertainty continued throughout the twentieth century, branded by Rev Ian Paisley [22] as 'Ulster's Battle Hymn'. It forms part of that process reinforcing an ideological position by reading back from contemporary crises 'into a mythical reading of the Bible'.[23]

Practices, habitus and critical revision

When addressing the challenge of establishing a basis for social ethics, McClendon draws on the importance of shared narrative and the concept of practices, arguing that for a society or community to have a coherent sense of identity it 'shall have a narrative tradition whose function is to provide a setting for the several practices of that society, one that unites them in a single web of meaning'.[24] McClendon develops the concept of powerful practices, by which he means practices that allow civil, traditional, religious, and other forms of structures to appear as the 'end and meaning of life'. [25] Powerful practices are not of necessity negative or harmful.

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[21] Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, "The Ulster Covenant: Ulster Day", Public Records Office of Northern Ireland, http://www.proni.gov.uk/index/search_the_archives/ulster_covenant/ulster_day.htm.

[22] Bruce correctly highlights the developments in evangelicalism (the emergence of fundamentalism in response to modernism and the eschatological perspectives of premillennialism) that make the phenomenon of Paisleyism significantly different from the Ulster Protestantism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Bruce argues that there is a very significant difference in the use of the language of covenant. Speaking of Free Presbyterians he says 'when they use the language of a "covenant" they are not thinking like the seventeenth century Scots Covenanters. Instead they are reasoning like secular liberals:[...] The Paisleyite fondness of Old Testament language and imagery has obscured the real nature of the movement's politics'. However, Bruce fails to do justice to the significance of the studied ambiguity of Paisley's political/religious rhetoric. Bruce sees the significance of the ambiguity between the generalized association of unionists as 'the Protestant people of Ulster' and Paisley's conventional evangelicalism regarding the 'true church' as comprising of those who are saved as an explanation as to why evangelicals (including Paisley) 'have been much less likely than other Ulster unionists to resort to vigilante violence'; Steve Bruce, *Paisley : Religion and Politics in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 245). It could equally, and more satisfactorily, be argued as Maloney does that, particularly in the formative years of the DUP, Paisley's Old Testament rhetoric 'produces a view of their relationship with Britain that is akin to a legal contract and fully consistent with the Scottish Covenanting tradition from which they spring— "We will remain loyal to Britain as long as they remain loyal to us"'; Ed Moloney, *Paisley : From Demagogue to Democrat?*, rev. and updated ed. (Dublin: Poolbeg Press, 2008), p. 239. See also M Elliott, *When God Took Sides: Religion and Identity in Ireland—Unfinished History* (Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 121.

[23] See Morrow, 'Fundamentalist Protestantism', p.60, who goes on to develop his understanding of the power of myth by arguing that we can see in Paisley's politico-religious language 'the myth of fundamentalist Protestantism […] acts against existential or experiential change', p. 63.

[24] McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 177.

[25] Ibid., p. 181

McClendon names 'powerful practices of the Christian community'[26] as preaching, baptism, and the Lord's Supper. What renders powerful practices harmful or destructive is the lack of clarity as to their end and neglect of legitimate processes of their operation.

Applying McClendon's observation retrospectively on the religious activities associated with the Ulster Covenant, it becomes clear that in the context of Ulster Protestant resistance to Home Rule in 1912 the practices of preaching, praying, and hymn singing were all employed in the light of a shared historical narrative of Protestant-Catholic antipathy, to reinforce a shared meaning of life to be defended at all costs by all means, Christian or otherwise. The use of the biblical imagery of covenant and appropriation of Psalm 90 in the form of hymn singing could be considered as powerful practices gone wrong in that they helped gel the community and reinforce the Reformed faith and British identity as structures with the power of determining the very meaning of life. Appropriated differently the same practices could have emboldened the community to embrace change with confidence in the God they claimed to worship.

When seeking to find a means of describing and understanding the process of how a community instinctively imbibes a fear, a prejudice or a disposition, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus is helpful.[27] For Bourdieu habitus is the concept that addresses the social nature of the construction of an individual's or community's view of themselves and their world. Bourdieu was not the first to coin or use the term habitus. Following Aristotle, Aquinas used the concept extensively when exploring the human disposition; but for Aquinas habitus was not so much to do with social interaction as the virtuous human disposition.[28]

Bourdieu's use of the concept, while still focused on disposition, is set in the context of the way disposition is shaped in the social and cultural setting.

It has to be acknowledged that the use of the concept of habitus has become something of a trend in many different disciplines. This offends Diane Reay who is somewhat frustrated at the liberal overlaying of terms such as 'capital' and 'habitus' on various phenomena absent of any theoretical engagement or rigour. She says 'in common with cultural capital, there is an increasing tendency for habitus to be sprayed throughout academic texts like intellectual hair spray, bestowing gravitas without doing any theoretical work'.[29] In response Reay provides a helpful definition of Bourdieu's conception of habitus, suggesting that it has to do with

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[26] Ibid., p. 222

[27] Pierre Bourdieu, 'Vive La Crise!: For Heterodoxy in Social Science', *Theory and Society* 17 (1988), pp. 773-87.

[28] Anthony Kenny, *A New History of Western Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 406.

[29] Diane Reay, '"It's All Becoming a Habitus": Beyond the Habitual Use of Habitus in Educational Research', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 25, no. 4 (2004), p. 432.

embodiment—'ways in which not only is the body in the social world but the social world is in the body'.[30] It includes ways of feeling, speaking, and thinking. She speaks of habitus as a 'system of dispositions to a certain practice', [31] which, in turn, provides the basis for modes of behaviour that go unchallenged.

It is central to the understanding of habitus that the source of most practices is not the rational choice of the individual or the constraint of rules, but the result of the outworking of 'durable and transposable dispositions (schemes of perception, appreciation and action), produced by particular social environments which functions as the principle of the generation and structuring of practices and representations.[32] Bourdieu says:

> Even when practice appears as rational action to an impartial observer who possesses all the necessary information to reconstruct it as such, rational choice is not its principle. Indeed, *social action has nothing to do with rational choice,* except perhaps in very specific crisis situations when the routines of everyday life and the practical feel of habitus cease to operate.[33]

Bourdieu wishes to avoid the twin fallacies of ascribing the choices we make to mere rational action or intellectualism on the one hand or of a mechanistic reaction on the other. Habitus is for Bourdieu a way of speaking of social norms guiding or determining the thinking and behaviour of individuals or communities. The concept of habitus is essentially that of structured, structuring dispositions, meaning the disposition to structure our world through particular instinctive practices as opposed to abstract intellectual decisions. Much of what we do we do instinctively, and even when we wish to reflect upon our actions or impending decisions, we do so in taken-for-granted ways using taken-for-granted means so that we continue to live and operate within the same fields of influence that have nurtured us in the first place.

Given the anthropological background to Bourdieu's social theory it is not surprising that Bourdieu views the acquisition of habitus as an embodied and physical process. Our identity is not first manifested in propositional statements but in the learned behaviour that places us within our community, be that language, dress, table manners, forms of social interaction, music, rituals, or whatever, so that 'the social body marshals my

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[30] Ibid., p. 432.
[31] Ibid., p. 434.
[32] Bourdieu, 'Vive La Crise!', p. 786.
[33] Bourdieu, 'Vive La Crise!', p. 783.

body to act as a kind of organ of that wider body and so primes my action in ways that resonate with the vision of the social body […].'[34]

With the benefit of historical hindsight and the record of events, written and photographic, we can see that religious practices such as hymn singing that galvanized the community on such a massive scale as that of Covenant Day in 1912 were not operating in isolation. The physical, bodily engagement of generations of church going and associated religious rhetoric and practices made the communities' narrative more than merely a story. It became a bodily reality generating reactions as instinctive as that of pulling one's hand from the flames of a fire. When the crisis of 1912 arose, travelling to huge rallies, standing in military order, marching through the streets of Belfast, gathering in church halls to sign the Covenant, were all part and parcel of an instinctive reaction to the instinctively perceived threat. What was given expression in the signing of the Covenant was the structured structuring of a way of seeing the world. Within this reality the Bible, its motifs and language, along with practices such as hymn singing and preaching, had a powerful role to play in giving voice to the core convictions, fears, and determination of the Protestant community.

Stassen has argued that moral formation requires constant critical re-formation. He contends that critical attention has to be paid to our emotions and loyalties. In addition, there must be a critical perception of the social context, of our basic convictions and of our processes of reasoning.[35] Stassen goes on to say:

> If an ethic lacks explicit attention to any of these dimensions, it either lacks the ability to take a clear stand on concrete ethical issues, or it takes the stand naively, unaware and uncritical about its own crucial assumptions.[36]

While reflecting on the moral reasoning of Christians during the Holocaust, Stassen and Gushee make the point that it is an instinctive human reaction to look for guidance when faced with profound moral choices. However, in such circumstances 'Frequently, Christians reflect their cultural and ideological captivity […]' for lack of a willingness to be self-critical. Discipleship, particularly in times of change or challenge, therefore needs to maintain cognizance of the narrative on which it rests, the practices it adopts, and a means of ongoing critical self-evaluation. Absent of the kind of self-

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[34] James K A Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom : How Worship Works, Cultural Liturgies* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2013), pp. 95-6

[35] Glen Harold Stassen, Rodney Lawrence Petersen, and Timothy A Norton, *Formation for Life: Just Peacemaking and Twenty-First-Century Discipleship* (Eugene, Ore: Pickwick Publications, 2013) , p. 3.

[36] Glen Harold Stassen and David P Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p. 59.

conscious revision proposed by Glen Stassen, the Ulster Protestant community of 1912 fell prey to fear and sowed the seeds of generations of fear and mistrust.

Conclusion: Discipleship as deconstruction

Although we started with the Irish situation in 1912 there is no merit in retrospectively declaring what should and should not have happened. It was of its time and within the Protestant community there were those who spoke out against the concept of the Ulster Covenant and the fears and threats with which it was associated. The benefit for us lies in the opportunity to ask questions of ourselves in our time and our situation. Discipleship is our present responsibility; we are the ones presently charged with bearing the likeness of Christ.

I would wish to suggest that in the same way in which McClendon defines the theological task as:

> the discovery, understanding or interpretation, and transformation of the convictions of a convictional community, including the discovery and critical revision of their relation to one another **and to whatever else there is**[37]

--so we should consider discipleship in similar terms.

McClendon's definition of theology is one that perplexes but if theologising is, as he contends, a second order activity and theology proper is what is lived by the professing community, it is entirely apposite. The theological task is one of holding to account, one of seeking the justification of the lived theology as judged against its own normative texts and practices. The discipleship task is surely similar. To think of discipleship as a programme to be taught or the situational questioning of 'what would Jesus do' would be a mistake. The essential nature of discipleship must surely be to learn the capacity for critical evaluation of all that constitutes our experience of habitus. That must include learning the skill of critical evaluation and re-evaluation of the convictions that lie at the core of our communities and the practices that manifest their reality. Discipleship should be thought about firstly as the task of deconstruction, rather than that of constructing a particular form of human being in the world. Construction models of discipleship are likely to construct a form of being in the world which finds itself in constant internal conflict. To attempt to learn a new way of being without the critical process of understanding and revising the essential nature of what we are as convictionally formed within a particular narrative and tradition is to seek to construct on ground that has not been

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[37] McClendon, *Ethics: Systematic Theology, Vol.1.*, p. 23.

thoroughly prepared or able to sustain the new construction. Perhaps we could adapt McClendon's definition of theology and suggest that:

> Discipleship includes the discovery, understanding and critical revision for transformation of the convictions and habitus that precede our discipleship journey.

In *A Thicker Jesus*, Stassen discusses the importance of recognizing that we do ethics within a tradition and that we are now more aware of the strength of influence of components of our traditions, the ideologies, philosophies, theologies, etc. that constitute our tradition or traditions. This awareness, he argues, demands from us the humility and willingness to change. Stassen puts it in terms of needing 'a process of continuous repentance—learning and self-correction'.[38]The language of repentance is commonplace, perhaps too much so. The language of deconstruction may facilitate a fresh appreciation of the significance of the call to call to discipleship.

The charge might be laid that this description of deconstruction as a primary element of discipleship is merely hostage to the Western educational concern for critical thinking and inappropriate as a normative approach, whatever the context. While it is willingly acknowledged that the language is indeed that of Western educational and academic methodology, the practice is much more universal and, indeed, clearly modelled in the record of the New Testament.

Stassen shows how, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' constant refrain of 'you have heard, but I say to you' outlines a series of transformative initiatives that deconstruct the contemporary norms that shape the disciples' world view and practice and replace them with norms in keeping with the Kingdom of God.[39] The Book of Acts outlines similar deconstruction and reconstruction actions of the Spirit. Peter's visit to the house of Cornelius is preceded by a deconstruction of profoundly held convictions and way of not just thinking, but being in his world. Peter's appearance before the Jerusalem Council, Barnabas' role as an emissary to Antioch, Paul's rebuke of Peter recorded in Galatians, typify the painful process of deconstruction and reconstruction in the process of discipleship and communal transformation. We should never assume that discipleship will be any less drastic or painful in our contemporary environments.

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[38] Glen Harold Stassen, *A Thicker Jesus: Incarnational Discipleship in a Secular Age*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012) , p.6
[39] *Just Peacemaking : Transforming Initiatives for Justice and Peace*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), pp. 53ff.